

LENT 2021
The Journey to Jerusalem
“My Response to Jesus ”
Mark 14:1-31
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Is there a movie you’ve watched so often you have many of the lines memorized? At the top of that list for me is the movie “Hoosiers”—starring Gene Hackman, Barbara Hershey and Dennis Hopper. It’s a classic David beats Goliath sports story about a small, 1950s, rural Indiana high school that overcomes great odds to win the state basketball championship. One Christmas break my brother Lon and I watched that movie at least half a dozen times together, until we could repeat many of the lines to each other.

Another movie some friends and I have watched so often the lines from it frequently crop up in our conversations is a comedy spin off on Homer’s Odyssey called, “O Brother Where Art Thou”, starring George Clooney. (As you can see, I don’t have cultured taste in movies. 😊)

When I watch movies like Hoosiers and O Brother Where Art Thou, I can recite many of the lines and I know the plot well, but my mind is usually on auto pilot, tuning into the scenes I like best and filtering most of the details. For many of us, I suspect that’s the way we read Scripture—especially well-known passages about Jesus’ birth, his crucifixion and his resurrection. When we know the plot so well and can quote many of the lines, the story becomes so familiar to us that we gloss over the details.

Our Scripture passage today—on Palm Sunday—comes from Mark’s Gospel chapter 14 verses 1-31—the story of Jesus’ last hours prior to his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. In case you’re tuning in with us for the first time today or if you’ve been with us, but need your memory jogged, I’m preaching a series during Lent titled, “The Journey to Jerusalem.” The cross and Jesus’ impending death was in the background of all He said and did, but Jesus didn’t have an unhealthy fixation with death. His focus on the cross enabled Him to journey through life in a posture of surrender to his Heavenly Father’s will and it provided Him with needed perspective. My challenge to us throughout Lent has been for us to “*fix our eyes on Jesus,*” embracing

surrender of ourselves and our circumstances to God and maintaining a perspective that recognizes there is much more to our lives than our short time on earth.

As I read this familiar passage of Scripture of today—Mark chapter 14 verses 1-31—I encourage you to be active listeners, rather than just passively absorbing what I’m reading, I encourage you to place yourself in this story. Consider which of the characters you most identify with in this account—the religious leaders, the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, the bystanders who criticized the woman for her undignified show of public emotion, or Jesus’ well known disciples Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter.

Mark 14:1-31

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ²“But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

¹²On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

¹³So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

¹⁶The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”

¹⁹ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”

²⁰ “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. ²⁵ “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

“You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: “‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

²⁹ Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

³⁰ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice^[c] you yourself will disown me three times.”

³¹ But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

There is a lot going on in those verses. The religious leaders have ratcheted up their plans to arrest Jesus; a woman anointed Jesus’ head with perfume, inciting backlash from those who thought the money could have been better spent on the poor; Judas Iscariot went to the religious leaders to betray Jesus; Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples and told them one of them would betray Him; and, Peter confidently declared he would stand with Jesus until the end. Are you able to find yourself in this story? **Of these characters, with whom do you most closely identify?** Let’s look more closely at the people who show up in this account.

The religious leaders—**Pharisees, Sadducees and Teachers of the Law**—had been opposed to Jesus from the start of his ministry. They saw Jesus as a threat to their religious

system and everything for which they stood. Their hostility had become so intense that now they were actively seeking to have Jesus killed. We know little about the **woman who anointed Jesus' head** with perfume. Tradition identifies her as Mary Magdalene, but she's anonymous in Mark's account. What we do know is that her love for Jesus was so deep she ignored acceptable protocol and showered Him with public affection. **Those who witnessed the woman's act of worship** were indignant. Her public display made them uncomfortable, and they complained that the money the perfume cost could have been spent in a more worthwhile way. The woman's devotion and Jesus' defense of her preparing Him for his burial appears to have been the final straw for **Judas**—he left Simon's house to betray Jesus. Finally, at the Passover meal, Jesus' prediction that all of the disciples would leave Him in his time of deepest need, caused **Peter** to boldly state, *"Even if all fall away, I will not."* And when Jesus assured Peter that he in fact would disown Jesus three times, Peter said, *"Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."* With which of these characters do you most closely identify?

I find it interesting that only one of the people who appear in the passage we read about the last days of his life responded positively to Jesus. Jesus praises the woman who anointed his head for her beautiful expression of worship, but the rest—the religious leaders, the witnesses of Jesus' anointing, Judas Iscariot, Peter and the other disciples—are portrayed negatively. While there may be a few of us who identify with the woman who expressed her adoration to Jesus by anointing his head with perfume, I'm guessing most of us relate more closely to those who responded poorly to Jesus—with hostility, skepticism, uncertainty or in Peter's case, bravado that betrayed a low degree of self-awareness. And some of us may have trouble identifying with these responses, but we can relate to complacency, distraction or fear. The great news for us is that whatever our tendencies are and however we might have responded to Jesus in the past, He demonstrated his love for us by extending forgiveness to us. That is ultimately what Holy Week is about. I love the way Philip Yancey expresses Jesus' forgiveness in his book, [The Jesus I Never Knew](#).

"In one of his last statements before dying, Jesus prayed, 'Father, forgive them'—all of them, the Roman soldiers, the religious leaders, his disciples who had fled in darkness, you, me, who have denied him in so many ways—'forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' Only by becoming a human being could the Son of God truly say with understanding, 'They do not know what they are doing.' He had lived among us. Now, he understood." Yancey p. 271

During Lent, as we reflect on Jesus' suffering and the sacrifice He made for us, we're brought face to face with our own sin—the ways in which we fail as followers of Jesus. Our fear, our insecurity, our doubts, our complacency, the ease with which we're distracted, and the list goes on, hinder us as we seek to follow Jesus. That's why the challenge to *"fix our eyes on Jesus"* is so important for us. As we embrace the truth of the Apostle Paul's words in Romans chapter 3 verse 23: *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* I'd like us to examine the responses two of Jesus' disciples made as they grasped the reality of their sin.

Judas—forever remembered as the one who betrayed Jesus—quickly realized the error of his way after Jesus was arrested. As notorious as Judas Iscariot is, we really know very little about him and can only speculate as to why he betrayed Jesus. Was Judas greedy and desperate for money? Was he disillusioned when the reality of Jesus' definition of what a Messiah looked like became apparent to him? Or was Judas trying to force Jesus' hand to resort to violence and power to save Himself from those who hoped to destroy Him? We're not given the answer as to why Judas betrayed Jesus, but when the force of what he had done hit him Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders and said, *"I have sinned for I have betrayed innocent blood."* Judas then threw the money into the temple and went away and hanged himself in despair.

Peter—one of the disciples in Jesus' inner circle—didn't betray Jesus, like Judas, but after pledging his undying support and promising to stand by Jesus to the end, he denied 3x that he even knew Jesus, eventually calling down curses on himself and swearing, *"I don't know the man!"* After Jesus' crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, Peter struggled. He had trouble accepting that Jesus was risen. He cowered in fear, thinking that like Jesus, he too might be arrested by the authorities. And then he returned to his occupation of fishing, apparently assuming his betrayal of Jesus had disqualified him as a disciple. But John chapter 21 tells us the remarkable story of Jesus' encounter with Peter after his resurrection. Jesus called out to Peter telling him how he could catch some fish. He revealed Himself to a surprised Peter. And then He walked Peter through healing and reconciliation—giving Peter the chance to declare his love for Jesus 3x, just as he'd earlier denied Him 3x.

Judas and Peter offer a powerful comparison and contrast for us. Both sinned grievously against their Lord in his hour of greatest need. Both suffered greatly when the realization of what they had done to Jesus settled in their minds and hearts. But Judas, in despair took his own life. Peter, although in a difficult place himself, was able to receive Jesus' forgiveness and experience healing and reconciliation with his Lord. My question for us today is, **"Which response will we choose?" When brought face to face with our sin, will we run from Jesus in despair, like Judas. Or, will we turn toward Jesus and receive his grace—his forgiveness, his restoration and reconciliation with Him?**

In preparation for receiving Communion today, I'd like to read today's lectionary reading from Psalm 31. I encourage you to receive these words as your prayer...

Psalm 31 selected

In you, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.

Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.

Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.

Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.

Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.

My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.

But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God."

My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.

Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

Let me not be put to shame, LORD, for I have cried out to you;

How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you.

In the shelter of your presence you hide them from all human intrigues; you keep them safe in your dwelling

Praise be to the LORD, for he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege.

In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.

Love the LORD, all his faithful people! The LORD preserves those who are true to him, but the proud he pays back in full.

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Communion Graphic

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and He broke it, saying, "*This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.*" He also took the cup saying, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.*"

Prayer

We receive the Lord's Communion today in remembrance of his suffering and sacrifice for us and as reminder of Jesus' love that He demonstrates through the grace and forgiveness that is available to each of us who have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. May the love of Jesus and the grace and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father wash over us as we eat this bread and drink from this cup. AMEN.