

Mark 14:1-15:47

14:1 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;

14:2 for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

14:3 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.

14:4 But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way?"

14:5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

14:6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me.

14:7 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.

14:8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.

14:9 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."

14:10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.

14:11 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.

14:12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

14:13 So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him,

14:14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

14:15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations

for us there."

14:16 So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

Proclamation of the WORD

Dear Friends,

The sermon this week is all God's. The story we read of Jesus' great entry into Jerusalem and his journey to the cross speaks volumes. Anything I could add is merely commentary on the greatest story ever told. So I invite you to imagine which character you might be in today's passage. Place yourself in the story of God's relentless redemption.

With which of these do you identify?

To begin there are a few faithful, un-named persons:

Water jar man who leads them to the upper room for the Last Supper and the homeowner who supplies the upper room- both assisting in God's plans, doing their part. They bravely participate in God's kingdom work offering their resources even at great risk as the pressure builds. I love these guys. I assume they are guys. They share their talents and possessions to assist Jesus in his mission. In the same way, Simon the Leper opened his house to Jesus. They may be bit players, but they play an important role.

Do you share what you have been given by God to build up the Body of Christ and the kingdom? In what ways?

Then there is the Woman with nard gift of love, kindness, and service. She is mourning the impending death of her beloved Lord. She is preparing him for burial giving her greatest treasure to honor Jesus. She is steadfast even in the face of her critics.

Do we give God our most valuable and precious things or do we hold them back?

Do we offer what we have in humble service? How?

That leads us to the most disappointing players in this drama. Those closest to Jesus are the ones who fail him in the biggest way. Jesus had prepared them that his journey would lead him into the heart of Conflict. And when conflict comes people behave at their worst. Betrayal, denial, and abandonment are the ways of Jesus' closest friends. Mark reminds us that they all desert him in the end.

Judas would betray Jesus for money. Judas has the awful role. He is the one to sell Jesus out.

Peter would deny knowing Jesus to save his own hide when the pressure is on.

And then there is my favorite, the man in the linen cloth in the Garden of Gethsemane. When the some of the mob grab him, he slips out of their hands. He just runs away naked leaving his linen cloth behind. In stressful situations most of us will choose "fight or flight." This guy picked flight and becomes the only streaker in the Biblical account.

I cannot imagine more stressful situation than this. Jesus is about to be lynched and his followers do not have the capacity to stay. I read about very real persecution happening across the globe where people are seriously in danger, and I can only imagine how they face it, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Danger, fear, and violence do horrible things to human beings. Fight or flight are human responses to fear.

We think of such violence existing somewhere else, but just this week four Missouri Presbyterian Churches were sent threats that their churches will be burned for the change to our Book of Order regarding marriage. I recall times in our history when churches have been burned over the issue of race or synagogues get firebombed as happened in Atlanta. Or clergy receive death threats as happened with my colleague Susan when she was a pastor in a small Florida town. She was targeted for being a woman in ministry. Hate and fear does terrible things to us.

We as members of this church sometimes do not have the capacity to stay in relationship when the going gets tough or disagreement happens. Just like Peter we deny knowing our brothers and sisters in Christ or like the Streaker some of us want to run away rather than stay at the table in fellowship. This breaks my heart as your pastor more than anything, when disagreement comes rather than talk to one another, we whisper in the parking lot, or worse, just cut each other off.

I always think of how tragic that is, cutting each other off, and how southern that is. My grandfather's sister, Mimi, and my grandmother had a "falling out" before I was born. I never knew what they were mad about. I only knew that they could never be in the same room together. Even though we lived in the same town, my family had to plan holidays around this feud. On Christmas day, for instance, we would make the rounds to each house to visit. As a child, it just seemed so silly to me.

The church is just a big family. We have made promises to be in fellowship with each other in the part of the Body of Christ- for better or worse. But fear and stress do terrible things to people. I get it. And there is always the hope that it will be better or easier elsewhere. In my experience, I have learned that running from problems never solves anything. And as we were reminded this week by our visiting scholar, Dr. Hobbie, about our own church history, disagreement has always been present in the church. Just read the New Testament. It is full of disagreement in the church. The things which hold us together, most importantly our trust in Jesus Christ as Lord, binds us together. And I agree with Dr. Hobbie that the bigger sin is to divide the church which is His very Body on this earth.

I love the motto of the Moravian church (Chuck's people):

In essentials, unity.

In non-essentials, liberty.

In all things, love.

I want to acknowledge that some are struggling and others are pleased with the majority of presbyteries approving a change to the Book of Order. Amendment 14f gives local church sessions and pastors the authority to decide on whether to allow members who are same gender to be married in States where that is legal. Please hear this as an invitation to discuss difficult things openly with any elder or pastor and even with those with whom you might disagree, speaking the truth in love. One of our foundational principles is that we practice "mutual forbearance." Let us model as a church that we can be different than the world which just yells, assumes the worse about those who disagree with them, gets mad, and cuts off relationship. We are God's covenant

community of faith. We can do better. We are better than this. We have important and meaningful ministry to do in our community and in our faith family.

Let's keep our eyes on Jesus who is head of our church and Lord, most importantly.

In Jesus' journey to the cross the ugliest parts of our humanity show up- denial, fear, abandonment, betrayal and violence. But Jesus remains steadfast and perseveres.

When Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with his disciples as we will on Thursday night at 7:30, he reminds them that He is the fulfillment of God's promises. Before the meal he takes a towel and water. He bends down and washes his disciples' feet.

He gives us a new commandment, to love one another as he has shown us to do.

Then he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it saying, "This is my body broken **for you.**"

He takes the cup, blesses it, and says, "This is the cup of the new covenant filled with my blood shed **for you**, poured out for the forgiveness of sins." He knows our shortcomings, our sin, and our guilt. He gives himself to us in grace, and we continually feed upon that grace as we are being sanctified. He says "Do this." That is a command, not a suggestion. Service and self-giving love guide us as we do this in remembrance of Him.

In all of the players in the Holy Week drama that I least identify with it is Jesus who gives all, his substance, his life "**for us.**"

The fourth century theologian Athanasius said that **God becomes like us in Jesus so that we may become like God.** In his life, death, and resurrection we get to be part of God's redeeming love.

God is like that from the beginning of the covenant promises as we have seen in this series on God's Faithful Promises. Remember:

From Noah, to Abraham and Sarah, to God giving the Law to Moses for us to know how to love God and love one another. Then God says through Jeremiah that he will write his law upon our hearts. Then ultimately, we see Jesus who is the fullest image of God we know, who teaches us how to live, how to die, and how to be raised to new life!

Thankfully God is relentless in His redeeming even when we are fickle and fearful! May our lives be a faithful response to that grace and good news!

He is steady in his love.

He is selfless in his giving.

He is relentless in his redeeming.

He is faithful to his mission to be *for us* in all ways.

He was born *for us*.

He lived to show us how to live.

He died *for us*

He was raised *for us*.

In turn, let us live FOR HIM.

PRAYER of Athanasius (contemporary language)

Uphold your Church, O God of truth, as you upheld your servant Athanasius, to maintain and proclaim boldly the catholic faith against all opposition, trusting solely in the grace of your eternal Word, who took upon himself our humanity that we might share his divinity; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

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