

The Way of the Cross

I. In the Garden (Mark 14:26-42)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Meditation:

Peter is bold and courageous. He loves his Lord. His life had been changed. Three years isn't a long time, really, but three years following Jesus . . . hearing His teaching, seeing His compassion, witnessing the miracles . . . how could that not change you? Peter is sincere. He wasn't a fisherman anymore - he was *a disciple*. A follower of Jesus. He would not fall away. He would not deny. He would die for Jesus.

His spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak.

For even before the Shepherd was struck, even before he had a chance to deny, he falls asleep. Three times. He couldn't even watch and pray for one hour with his distressed and sorrowful friend. Peter meant well, but good intentions aren't enough.

You know what it's like. We have good intentions, too. But how often have we failed? How often have we fallen asleep? How often do we not keep our word - to others and to God? Too often. Our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak.

But Jesus remains steadfast. Greatly distressed and troubled, He turns to His Father in prayer. In great sorrow He prays, *Not what I will, but what you will*. Jesus knows the cup He must drink, the cup of wrath and condemnation for the sin of the world. It will not be easy. But His Father's will is His will. He will drink it. Peter will not die for Him; He will die for Peter. And for you. He will be the strong one for the weak, the faithful one for the faithless. He will go as it is written of Him.

The hour has come. Now He gives His life for the life of the world.

II. Betrayed and Alone (Mark 14:43-52)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." And they all left him and fled.

And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

Meditation:

Until this time, the people didn't run away from Jesus, they ran *to* Him! They came from all over - the sick, the lame, the blind. Wherever He went, they went. That He might touch them. Because His touch brought life. It healed the sick, restored sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and even raised the dead. They were in danger and turned to Him.

But now Jesus is alone. His disciples have all left Him and ran away from Him in fear. They were in danger and fled from Him. Even a young man who followed in nothing but a linen cloth ran away naked. The only disciple left was the betrayer, the one who had run away to arrange all this, and whose kiss was the kiss of death. And now the hands were *on Him* - not to help Him but to arrest Him. They come with swords and clubs, weapons of the world. They didn't need them. He would give Himself to them and place Himself into their hands. They didn't need them, for the battle now commencing was not a worldly one, but a spiritual one.

Jesus had been fighting this battle for three years, day after day, in the Temple, teaching. For His weapon, His sword, was His Word. And many battles had been won - demons were expelled, and sinners brought to repentance and faith. But now the last and greatest battle will unfold, a battle of life and death. The battle of the cross. Satan and men will slay the Son of God, but will not be victorious. The Scriptures will be fulfilled. After the Sabbath is past, they will come looking for Him in His tomb. But all they will find is His linen cloth, left behind, when He left the tomb empty and defeated. They seized Him, but not for long.

Hymn #420 (vs. 1-3) "Christ, the Life of All the Living"

III. Condemnation (Mark 14:53-65)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on

him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows.

Meditation:

The outcome was predetermined. They weren't letting Him go, now that they had Him right where they wanted Him. He was not going to leave alive. But still they wanted the appearance of justice. But witness after witness would not agree. Not even false witnesses, lying witnesses, could get the job done. So frustrated, the high priest stands up and tries to get Jesus to speak - but He will not. He will not defend Himself.

But He *will* confess. He will confess and not keep silent when it comes to the truth, no matter what the result. So when asked: *Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?* He does speak. He has come that all the world might know the love of God. That all might know *Him*. That all - even the high priest, chief priests, elders, and scribes - might be saved. So He speaks: I AM, He says. I AM. The divine name. The name God gave when Moses asked Him at the burning bush what His name was (Exodus 3:14). That same God was now standing before men, answering the same question. And for this, they accuse Him of blasphemy, condemn Him to death, spit on Him, and mock Him.

They are pleased with themselves. They have accomplished their mission. Jesus will die. But even as they try to get Jesus to prophesy, *they* have fulfilled prophecy already - the prophecies that said all this would happen. And the Word of the Lord will be fulfilled. For you. He is accused and condemned for you. He is mocked and hit for you. He is spit on for you. His love for you will let Him do nothing less. The chief priests and Jewish leaders want to save themselves and their nation. The Son of the Blessed wants to save only you.

IV. Denying and Confessing (Mark 14:66 - 15:5)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the rooster

crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Meditation:

Are you one of them? the servant girl asked Peter.
Are you the King of the Jews? Pilate asked Jesus.

I am not. I do not know Him, says Peter vehemently.
You have said so, Jesus affirms.

What was going on outside and what was going on inside could not have been more different. Timidity versus steadfastness. Denial versus confession. Fear versus quiet strength. When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered his own crowing, the boast he had so confidently made that he would never deny his Lord, his friend. But he did. Jesus must have heard the rooster too. But hearing just made Him *more* steadfast - for it was for folks like Peter and you and me that He will not deny, but go to His cross.

What a comfort for us, when we shrink back in fear like Peter. When we don't say what we know we should. When fear gets the better of us. When the trouble of the moment seems greater than our Lord. It is not so. Our Lord is greater than whatever troubles us, haunts us, frightens us, or condemns us. He is greater than whatever threatens us, overwhelms us, or crushes us. He is greater than our sin, our death, and the devil. For all this comes upon Him, and He allows it to crush Him for a time, that He might crush it for eternity. And in His resurrection He does.

So Peter broke down and wept. But as Jesus said in the psalm: *Weeping may remain for the night, but joy comes in the morning* (Psalm 30:5). And joy would come for Peter, and for you. The joy of His Saviour risen. The joy of sin forgiven. The joy that though we may deny Him, He will never deny us.

Hymn #425 “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

V. Traded and Mocked (Mark 15:6-20)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Meditation:

A rebel. A murderer. An insurrectionist. A prisoner. A trouble maker. Barabbas? No, I was talking about you. Oh, Barabbas too. But this is where you are in the story. And me. We who rebel and rise up against our heavenly King. We who fail to help and support our neighbor in every physical need. We who are prisoners to sin and death. We deserve to die.

But what happens? Barabbas is set free! Imagine the thoughts that must have been going through his mind. Just moments before, he had heard the shouts from his prison cell: Crucify him! Crucify him! His blood ran cold, for he thought they were shouting this for him. And then the soldiers come down to his cell and turn the key, but instead of binding him to the horizontal beam of a cross and leading him out to die, they say: *You are free to go.* What? What happened? And then they tell you: The Passover pardon was given to him. He decided to keep another prisoner, named Jesus. They'll be crucifying him instead of you. And just like that, He is free.

Talk about being in the right place at the right time! Barabbas? No, I was talking about Jesus. This is why He came. To trade places with Barabbas. To trade places with you. To trade places with every sinner, every condemned person. To take our sin and condemnation upon Himself, in our place, that we receive the Passover pardon. His

Passover pardon. That we hear those wonderful words spoken to us: *They'll be crucifying Him instead of you. Go, you are forgiven; you are free.*

Jesus, the Son of God, becomes the criminal, that the name of Barabbas, the criminal, might come true. For Barabbas, bar-abbas, means literally, *son of the father*. And Jesus takes your place, that that be true for you, too. That you be a bar-abbas, a son of the father, a son of God.

VI. On the Cross (Mark 15:21-37)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

Meditation:

Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.

If Jesus had come down from the cross at that very moment, they would see and perhaps believe, but they would not be saved. For they would have no Saviour. There would be

no atonement for their sin. They would be lost. Yet if Jesus stays, they would not see and therefore not believe, yet they would have a Saviour. Their sin would be atoned for. There would be hope for them.

So Jesus stays. For it is not miraculous signs that produce faith anyway. If Jesus had come down from the cross at that moment, would they have believed, or would they have accused the soldiers of doing a shoddy job in not attaching Him more securely? You know the answer to that. No, it is not signs and wonders that produce faith, but the Word and Spirit of God.

And the word of God that we heard was this: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* But He was not calling Elijah. He was teaching us. That we learn the meaning of the cross. That He was forsaken because of our sin, to pay for our sin, to suffer for our sin. That He was forsaken, that we never be. And yet even in that moment of mysterious forsakenness between the Father and the Son, there is a word of faith: MY God, Jesus says. Forsaken, yet mine. Jesus trusts, even in the darkness of death and the pang of hell.

And because He did, because He did what we cannot, your sin is atoned for, there is hope for you. You will never be forsaken. Jesus' Father is your Father, His God your God, and His death the death of your sin and death. *Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed* (John 20:29).

Hymn #451 (vs. 1-3) "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted"

VII. Death and Burial (Mark 15:38-47)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for

the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Meditation:

The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The curtain of the temple, which separated the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God, from the rest of the world, was torn open. God had left the building.

Bad news? No, good news! Now, there was no more separation between God and men. The wall of sin that divided Creator and creature was gone. No more sacrifices need be offered in the temple. God and man were reconciled by the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). God had indeed left the building. No longer would people have to come to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice for sin. He now goes out into all the world to give the gift of forgiveness of sin. That in every place where His Word is proclaimed and His gifts given, there is He.

They didn't realize that yet, of course. All they knew right at this moment was that their friend, the one who they thought was their Messiah, was dead and needed to be buried. They would do this one, last, final act of love for Him. They take Him down, lay Him in the cold, stony tomb, and close it up.

You've been there. You know how that feels, when standing by the grave of a loved one, and the dirt covers their remains. It hurts. Death hurts. God knows. It took His only-begotten Son. But coming is the joy. The joy of life. The joy of resurrection. The joy of reunion. The centurion was right . . . almost. *Truly this man was the Son of God?* No. Truly He is. For He lives, and so will all who put their trust in Him. For just as the grave will not be able to hold Him, so it will not be able to hold us. And so we have hope, in the midst of this world of sorrow and death. We have hope, and so name this day GOOD Friday. For this is the day when we are made good again. When creation is restored to its goodness. By Jesus.

So we are not sad today. Serious, yes. Sad, no. For we know this is not the end of the story. The best is yet to come. So to our Saviour Jesus Christ, we give all thanks and praise. To our Great Redeemer, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. AMEN.