**JOURNEYING THROUGH HOLY WEEK TO EASTER WITH MARK’S GOSPEL**

**MAUNDY THURSDAY 01 April 2021**

*The second section below on* ***The Events of the Night:******Betrayal, Arrest, Blasphemy and Denial*** *can either be taken on this day, or on the next (Good Friday).*

Focus your attention on God and become aware again of God’s presence with you, and of joining with other worshippers (as in the Introduction to this series).

Thank God for bringing you safely to this day. Ask God to inspire you.

Then read these passages, paying attention to them as you do. What catches your imagination? What puzzles you? How do they make you feel?

**THE LAST SUPPER AND GETHSEMANE**

**Mark 14:12-31 (NRSV)**

12On 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?’ 13So 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, 14and 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?” 15He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.’ 16So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

17When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.’ 19They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, ‘Surely, not I?’ 20He said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. 21For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’

22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ 23Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’

26When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27And Jesus said to them, ‘You will all become deserters; for it is written,
“I will strike the shepherd,
   and the sheep will be scattered.”
28But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.’ 29Peter said to him, ‘Even though all become deserters, I will not.’ 30Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ 31But he said vehemently, ‘Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And all of them said the same.

**Reflection**

Shared meals are important. They do not just fuel the body, but also deepen relationships and nurture the soul. Elements of them and actions at them can take on great meaning and huge emotional significance. Jesus shared meals with the crowds [eg Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-9], and with individuals and groups, including his disciples. These culminated in a last supper with his disciples before he was handed over and crucified. At a Passover meal Jews then and now use the elements of the meal to remind them of how God freed them from slavery in Egypt to be his people, and of the hardship and the cost, but also the sacrificial love involved. Jewish people have always thought that the stories in the Bible tell them what God was like for their ancestors. But they also think that, since God is always the same, the stories also tell them what God is like for them in the here and now. The story becomes their story. And they become part of the story.

Sometime in the Passover season Jesus held his last supper with his disciples. He began by commandeering a room like he commandeered a donkey on his entry into Jerusalem just a few days before. He saw the Passover story coming true in his own story. He knew that within days he was going to be betrayed, condemned and killed. He believed that, through this, God would release people from what held them captive and bring them to new life.

He then went beyond the Passover imagery. He went on to identify his body with the bread and his blood with the wine, separated as in a sacrifice. He was prepared to love God and other people even at the cost of his life. In sharing the bread and wine with his disciples, he invited them to share in that with him, to take up their cross and follow him – and to find that he was with them as they did so.

He knew that Judas would betray him, Peter would deny him, and they would all fall asleep or run away or fail him in some way. Yet he still welcomed them to share the meal. Such grace and forgiveness! Do we sometimes take it too lightly, when we share the meal and he comes to be with us?

**Mark 14:32-42 (NRSV)**

32They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ 33He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34And he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.’ 35And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36He said, ‘Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.’ 37He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ 39And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41He came a third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.’

**Reflection**

After their Last Supper, Jesus asked his disciples to pray with him in Gethsemane, and pray that they not be brought to their breaking point. The phrase echoes that in the Lord’s Prayer which we sometimes say as “Save us from the time of trial” or “Lead us not into Temptation”. That is what he was praying, and what he wants us to pray. In Gethsemane notice how he keeps going ahead of them until he is left on his own. He acknowledged that his own will was for the cup of suffering to be taken away from him. But he prayed that God’s will be done in and through him on earth, as it is in heaven [Mark 14:36]. That is the Lord’s Prayer again. Can we stay with him and pray it this Easter, weak and frail as we are?

**Prayer**

God our Father, you have invited us to share in the supper

which your Son gave to his Church.

Nourish us, we pray, by his presence,

and unite us in his love;

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. **Amen** *Methodist Worship Book p. 537*

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**THE EVENTS OF THE NIGHT:** **BETRAYAL, ARREST, BLASPHEMY AND DENIAL**

**Mark 14:43-52 (NRSV)**

43Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. 44Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.’ 45So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, ‘Rabbi!’ and kissed him. 46Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. 47But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48Then Jesus said to them, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? 49Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.’ 50All of them deserted him and fled.

51A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, 52but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

**Reflection**

In a crisis, as we are discovering in the Covid-19 pandemic, momentous events can seem both to come incredibly quickly and at the same time last for ever. The events in this passage occur “immediately” (to use Mark’s term) after the ones at the Last Supper and in Gethsemane. No sooner has Jesus said that his betrayer is at hand than that betrayer arrives on the scene. It is Judas. In a sense we expected that, because Mark 14:10-12 has already told us that Judas had begun plotting to betray Jesus. But in that passage and now again here Mark emphasises that Judas is one of the Twelve. This betrayal is not by a chance outsider or a fringe player, but by a member of the core group of Jesus’s followers. Jesus had said that they would all fail and desert him in various ways [Mark 14:26-31]. Yet he had not rejected them, and still shared his last supper with them. Does that mean that there is hope for you and me, who try to be his followers and constantly fail?

Judas is a quintessential example of that desertion. Jesus had seen into him and through him. He knew that he was plotting. Judas had been to see the authorities before he came to the supper. At the supper, he is not mentioned by name, but is simply there with the rest of the Twelve. Jesus says that there is a betrayer among them, but does not identify him in any way. In a sense Judas is anonymous, fading for a moment into the background. At some point (Mark does not tell us when) he slips away altogether. He is not amongst those who go with Jesus to Gethsemane.

Now he has reappeared. He is accompanied by a crowd or mob of people, so presumably not an organised group of troops or what we might call “agents of law enforcement”. They have come at the informal instigation or incitement of people in authority (chief priests, scribes and elders), who have not come themselves. It is worth pondering whether there are echoes of this in such recent events as the invasion of the Capitol in the USA.

The mob are looking to arrest Jesus by surprise, and out of the public gaze. Identifying individual people is hard, though, when they are not in the context where you have seen them before, when it is dark, and when they are in a group of others. Judas therefore indicates which one is Jesus by going up to him and kissing him.

The mob move to apprehend Jesus. He says they need not have done it secretly, under the cover of darkness, because he has been openly teaching in the Temple each day. They are treating him as if he were a clandestine terrorist or bandit. That is ironic when you remember that in Mark 11:17 Jesus had used the same term to accuse people of turning the Temple from being a house of prayer into being a bandits’ or terrorists’ den.

In any event, the mob who have come with Judas are carrying weapons. This is presumably to give them courage, and because they are afraid that they might meet violent resistance. In that, they are not completely wrong. Someone standing nearby who is a disciple or sympathiser with Jesus has a sword and slices off the ear of one of the high priest’s slaves. That, though, is not the way of Jesus. He implicitly rebukes the use of violence on all sides and offers no resistance. Instead, he talks of letting the scriptures be fulfilled. Mark does not explain whether particular texts are being thought of here, and it is hard to think of any which would apply. The Hebrew scriptures do, however, have a general theme of servants of God who suffer alone in order in order to fulfil their vocation and mission. Isaiah 53, for example, talks of a suffering servant. Jeremiah’s life in many ways exemplified that theme – and it was Jeremiah who had talked of a bandits’ den in relation to the Temple!

Moreover, in Gethsemane Jesus had prayed that God’s will and not his own be done. As we saw earlier, that sentiment is echoed by a phrase found in Matthew and Luke in what we know as the Lord’s Prayer (“Your kingdom come; your will be on earth as it is in heaven”). Mark’s story from this point onwards shows what it means for that prayer to be embodied in practice. The mob apprehend Jesus and hold him fast. The Twelve (other than Judas) and his other followers all desert him and run away. That may not be an exact fulfilment of a particular biblical text but it is very much in line with what Jesus himself had said at the Last Supper.

What would we have done? As we have read or listened to Mark’s story we have gradually been drawn into the scene. Although we were not part of the historical band of Jesus’s close followers, we are onlookers – and some of us might be wanting to follow him at least a little in the circumstances of our lives.

The wonder is that we have a representative in the story that Mark tells. A young man who is not in the core group tries to follow him (both physically and in terms of more general discipleship) and not run away. When people try to apprehend him, though, unlike Jesus he tries to resist and evade arrest. He fails to carry though his desire to follow Jesus. When it comes to the crunch, he finds it less embarrassing and shameful to be seen running away naked than to be taken to be a disciple of Jesus. What would you have done?

**Mark 14:53-65**

53 They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. 54Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

55Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. 56For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. 57Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 58‘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.” ’ 59But even on this point their testimony did not agree.

60Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?’ 61But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’ 62Jesus said, ‘I am; and
“you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of the Power”,
and “coming with the clouds of heaven.” ’

63Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘Why do we still need witnesses? 64You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?’ All of them condemned him as deserving death. 65Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, ‘Prophesy!’ The guards also took him over and beat him.

**Reflection**

Peter, however, had promised never to desert Jesus. After his initial running away, he seems to have recovered his nerve. He follows, presumably at a safe distance, as the crowd takes Jesus to the High Priest. He slips into the building, not just into the more public forecourt but into the inner courtyard where he mingles with the guards as they warm themselves by the fire. As we read or hear the story, we find ourselves going with him. It means that we can see and hear what is happening.

With the high priest we find chief priests, elders and scribes. It was on their instigation that the crowd had gone to arrest Jesus [14:43]. Arguments continue to this day about what they were doing and whether they were allowed to do it or not. Was it a formal proceeding or an ad hoc ‘kangaroo’ court? Much of our information about such proceedings comes from sources written down after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and some much later. How much do they reflect the situation in the early 30’s? Were the Jewish authorities at this time allowed by the Romans to hold a trial and sentence someone to death? Were they able to hold proceedings at night? We struggle to make sense of it all. The gospel writers were struggling too, and they each made sense of it in slightly different ways.

What is clear is that Mark thinks that the Jewish authorities have decided to get rid of Jesus, and are looking for a way to do it, but are finding it hard to construct a coherent and persuasive case [14:55-6]. What seems to have most purchase is the idea that Jesus had threatened the temple. We saw in Monday’s reflection that in Mark chapters 11 and 12 Jesus had criticised what was happening in the temple, and said that it was so rotten to the core that it was doomed. There is an attempt to twist this into an accusation, but the witnesses do not agree with each other (14:57-59).

What is Jesus doing whilst all this is going on? It is interesting to compare it with what he had said was the way his disciples should behave [see 13:9-13]. He says nothing [14:60-61]. Then the high priest asks him directly whether he is not just God’s anointed agent (i.e. the Messiah/Christ) as Peter had recognised at Caesarea Philippi, but also whether he is the Son of God, as the voice from heaven had declared at his baptism and again at his transfiguration. This makes sense if the high priest has begun to recognise what is implied by Jesus’s words and deeds in the Temple and his challenges to the religious structures and those in authority over them. So because this is now perhaps the time, and because the Spirit moves him to speak, for the first time Jesus directly accepts the description, although he does not say the words himself. He does, though, go on to talk in his preferred way of himself as the Son of Man, whose role as suggested by Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1 is to come and judge the world in God’s name - and therefore, implicitly, to judge those attempting to judge and condemn him [14:61-62].

If you were there listening and watching, what would you expect the high priest to do next? Technically, blasphemy involved pronouncing the divine name, which Jesus has not actually done. But the high priest decided that there is enough implicit in what Jesus has said to justify treating it as blasphemy. The chief priests, elders and scribes all agree. They state that Jesus deserves to die. The cruel mockery and beating begin (14:63-65).

Jesus had repeatedly said that he would be handed over and condemned to death. Each time that he said it, he had quickly gone on to say that anyone who wishes to be one of his followers must walk with him on the same way. So why are we surprised that our attention is suddenly switched back to Peter? There we are with him in the inner courtyard as he warms himself by the fire amongst the guards. He is suddenly recognised by one of the high priest’s servant-girls as being one of Jesus’s disciples. He denies it, and goes back out into the more public forecourt, noticeably moving away from Jesus as he does. Twice more he is challenged. Twice more he denies his connection with Jesus. As Jesus had predicted, despite Peter’s protestations that he would never desert him, when things come to a head, he completely fails him. At each denial a cock crows. Peter bursts into tears [14:66-72].

As you look on, what are you doing? Are you condemning Peter? Or empathising? Like him, are you bursting into tears?

**Prayer**

Gracious and eternal God,

look with mercy on this your family,

for which our Lord Jesus Christ

was content to be betrayed

and given up into the hands of sinners

and to suffer death upon the cross;

who is alive and glorified with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. **Amen.** *Methodist Worship Book p. 538*

**The Lord’s Prayer**