

## I. Intro:

A. One of the things I worked on during my sabbatical was my blind spots. You don't get to 64 without realizing you have a few. Well, hopefully you don't get to 64 without realizing it. And this seemed pretty central to my goal of "working on my heart."

1. I did some other things, but this felt like part of what I needed to focus on.

2. In my first sabbatical – 15 years ago - I felt the need to get out from the stresses of the job to see if the foundation was solid. And I wrote a book on Jesus, but the big takeaway was that I did love Jesus. It wasn't just my job.

B. As you might imagine, it was quite unpleasant. But it's pretty central to walking with Jesus. His parable in which a man with a log in his eye insists on trying to take the speck out of his neighbor's eye comes to mind. As does our passage today.

C. We're near the end of Mark. Easter is next week. You will not want to miss it.

D. Today – as we move through the final hours before he is arrested and crucified - we are going to focus on his announcement that: one of them is going to betray him, and all of them are going to abandon him.

E. In a scene that I hope gets our attention, we are going to see Jesus tell his inner circle that they have blind spots. That they do not understand themselves very well. He is going to say to those closest to him – to those who think they are on the inside, who consider themselves leaders of the movement, who almost certainly think they are - if not better than others, more closely aligned with Jesus than others, that they're going to have an epic failure.

F. In the first nine verses of Mark 14 we read about Mary (Lazarus's brother not Jesus's mother) anoints Jesus with expensive perfume. It's a memorable scene for a few reasons, one of which is because Judas – who was the groups' treasurer – expressed indignation over how much money was wasted.

1. Jesus famously noted that the poor would always be with them - which didn't mean, don't help them. He was trying to alert them to the fact that he would soon be gone. (What Mary did was later understood to be an act of preparing Christ's body for death and burial).

2. Johnathan Edward preached a sermon on this, noting that what was so shocking about Mary's action was its uselessness. Mary had already seen Lazarus rise from the dead. She'd gotten out of Jesus what she was after. But that was not how she was approaching this. Edwards notes that while Judas found Jesus useful, Mary found him beautiful.<sup>1</sup> There is likely a bit of both Mary and Judas in each of us. We need to work on seeing more of the beauty of Jesus.

G. In verse 10 we read about Judas sneaking away to betray Jesus to the chief priests. They need help finding him away from the crowds so they can arrest him without causing a riot. Judas agrees to let them know where he will be.

H. Verses 12 – 26 are about the Last Supper – in which Jesus transforms the Passover celebration into Holy Communion.

1. The Passover – which had been going on for about 1,300 years – was designed to reinforce the idea that sin is a capital offense. When we sin, we deserve to die, but an innocent third party can die in our place.
2. Jesus has timed his arrival into Jerusalem to coincide with the Passover because he is the Passover lamb. There are all kinds of clues in the text, such as the timing, such as John calling Jesus the Lamb of God, such as the fact that Jesus is crucified without any of his bones being broken, but the Last Supper is a really, really big one. You may not see this the first time you read through the Bible, but after a few readings should. You realize the claim that the Passover was always about Jesus. It had been a placeholder to foreshadow what he would do.

## II. Mark 14:12-26

**A. On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover) 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?" So 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. Say 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?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."**

**B. The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 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." Please note – he doesn't name the one. He knows who it is. But he doesn't call Judas out. We're coming back to this. They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"**

**C. "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man - this is the way he most often referred to himself. It sounds modest but it is not. In Daniel 7 we read:**

1. "and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

2. That is the Son of Man. Jesus's claim to be the Son of Man is a bold claim.

**D. Reading on. As Jesus is setting up communion, he says, "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."**

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

**F.** “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. “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.”

**G.** When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. This is where Jesus has been staying at night. It’s about a half mile away.

III. I suspect you know how the rest of the chapter unfolds:

A. In verses 27 – 31 Jesus predicts Peter’s denial. And Peter says it will not happen. “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”<sup>2</sup>

B. In verses 32 – 41, we follow Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane, where He asks that the cup pass from his hands.

1. As a side note, in Greek Gethsemane means oil press. It looks like this (IMAGE), and the way you got the oil out was to crush the oil and the pits. So it refers to going under great pressure. In these verses Jesus prays that he will not have to be crushed.

2. This scene is bookended by Jesus asking for their support and their repeatedly falling asleep.

C. In verses 43 – 51 we read about Christ’s arrest. The soldiers move in. Peter uses a sword to cut off the ear of a servant of the High Priests. Jesus stops the melee, heals the servant and asks the leaders why they came at night when he’d been out in the open every day. He then agrees to go with them back to Jerusalem, at which point everyone flees.

D. In verses 53 – 65 we are told about Jesus’s brief imprisonment and his trial before the Sanhedrin.

E. And then – in verses 66 – 72 – we get Peter’s denial of Jesus.

IV. I want to draw your attention to something that is easy to miss: the way Jesus forces the disciples to examine their heart. By this point in the book, we should know that sin is a problem, but it can be hard for us to see how much of a problem it is for us. Think about it.

A. In the first two chapters of Genesis, we learn that God creates a good world and that we – you and I, those made in his image - are highly valued.

1. You may have heard about a debate that went viral early this year – between Billy Carson (a best-selling author who has made a mark claiming that the Bible is wrong, and copied from more ancient texts) and Wesley Huff, a Canadian apologist getting his PhD in New Testament at the University of Toronto. It was a rout. Hard to watch because Carson is beaten so badly. He did all he could to suppress it – even threatening lawsuits if it was released. And it’s

2. Among about a dozen ways that Huff is undoing Carson’s reckless claims is by noting how different what we have in Genesis 1 and 2 – where humans are given dignity – and the other origin stories where humans are created as slaves of the gods.

3. Of course this isn't the whole picture. What we need to understand – hold in tension – are three ideas at the same time. In addition to being highly valued, we are deeply fallen and greatly loved.

B. The Bible opens saying we are made in the image of God, and it is good. But then we get the fall and the curse. And between Genesis 4 and 11 – the 7 chapters sandwiched between the Fall (Gen. 3) and the Call of Abraham (Genesis 12 - which sets up the next 1,000 pages of the Bible) - it is made very clear that the fall was cataclysmic. We are profoundly damaged. We are not able to be good enough to earn God's love. We get this in Genesis 4-11, and we are also given parade of people making mistakes.

1. Adam falls. Noah gets drunk. Abraham lies. Jacob cheats. Moses commits murder. David commits adultery and murder. Jonah flees. Thomas doubts. Peter denies Christ. Paul persecutes Christians.

2. We are broken. I'm not saying we are as bad as we can be. We are not. But every aspect of our life is affected by sin. We are damaged physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. If our life could be represented by a glass of liquid – the idea is not that the liquid is poison. It's good, but poison has been mixed in to all of it. We are compromised physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually.

3. At a moment like this I typically cite the great line from Solzhenitsyn, "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

4. Or to quote CK Chesterton: No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is.<sup>3</sup>

5. Or Lewis. In Problem of Pain, when he writes: "I do not know whether all people are wicked. I know that I am. And I know that as long as I am a man, I cannot help it. I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like; but I do know what the heart of a good man is like—and it is terrible."

6. Or Paul in Romans 7.

V. So what I want to point out is that at the moment – at this highwater moment in Christ's earthly ministry. He has paraded in. The city is on high alert. All eyes are on him. And he is talking about his upcoming death. It is here that he calls on all of them to examine their heart.

A. As he is passing around the cup – declaring that He is going to die for the sins of the world. Declaring that he is the Passover Lamb. Declaring that the story is all about him. He is the Son of Man. God. The Messiah. The hinge point of all of history. He chooses this moment to remind them about their failures. Why? Why this timing?

B. Why, while noting that he is going to have to die for sin, does he go out of his way to note that it's not someone else's sin. Not Nero's or Caligula's or the legion of tyrants ever since, but his own disciples. Peter and John. You and me.

C. Why? Because it can be so hard for us to see.

VI. As I mentioned last week, one of the things I did early in my sabbatical was an exercise I later learned is called a ruthless, moral inventory and is part of AA's 12 steps

- A. My goal on this sabbatical was to work more on my heart than my head.
- B. This time I had a number of other things to work on – prepping for the next Lakelight class, preparing for upcoming sermons, looking ahead for the next ten years, lots of reading, half finished projects. But one of the big ones was working on my heart, so I started with a silent retreat. I went to a local retreat center for 3 days of silence and disconnection. And I failed. I couldn't get my heart to slow down. The popcorn popper kept popping.
- C. So, on week two I went to a cabin in Wisconsin by myself. And I decided to write down all my sin and fears and failures. And to see it.
- D. And it was uglier than I could imagine. And very discouraging. And embarrassing. And overwhelming. (In the middle of it I texted a few people and asked for prayer. And their responses were very kind).
- E. There is more that I can say. I spoke to a few people about it. I told Sheri that I felt like Eustace in Voyage of the Dawn Treader – who tries to de-dragon himself. And fails.
- F. And I have talked with several friends, asking if I am doing remedial or advanced work – and hearing that advanced work is often remedial work. .

VII. All of that to say, it's worth noting something in our text. At this moment – which is not just between Christ's Triumphal Entry and his crucifixion, but between the first communion and his death – that although Jesus knows who will betray him, he doesn't name Judas. He says, "One of you is going to betray me. One of you is going to hand me over to those who will kill me.

- A. And it leaves them all asking, "Who? Me? Not me! Me?"
- B. He could have named Judas, but he doesn't. He could have acted like Nathan when Nathan confronts David – calling him out directly. Or been like the White Witch in Narnia, who says, "One of you is a betrayer. There he is!" pointing to Edmund. But he doesn't. Why is he ambiguous? Because Jesus wants everyone of the disciples to look into his own heart. He wants us to search our own motivation.
- C. Let me suggest that Mark sets up a bit of a contrast here – between Mary, who does this wonderful thing for Jesus simply because of who He is. simply because she loves him. And Judas, who sells him out because Jesus is not going to do the things Judas had expected.
- D. What is your motivation? Do you even know?
- E. Let me suggest that that we are given two examples to choose from. Let me suggest that we all have a bit of Judas in us. And, if we are Christians, a bit of Mary in us. (By the way, this is not Mary the mother of Jesus. This is Mary the sister of Lazarus).
- F. I am not suggesting that we are Judas, but we have got some of that in us. Can you see it? Wrestling with our heart – owning our sin, seeing our motivations clearly – takes time.<sup>4</sup>

1. Let me suggest that we have all got some Judas in us
2. What is going on in your own heart? It may be that we can only see when we suffer. It may only be in a trial that we can see under the surface of our own heart and see: am I like Mary – loving God because he is beautiful and wonderful? Or am I simply doing this for myself.

G. In classical literature, a tragedy is a story in which the protagonist ends in a worse condition than where he began and a comedy (classically defined) is the opposite. It's a story of ascent in which the protagonist ends in a better place than where he began.

1. As Americans, we sure prefer the later. Our imaginations are shaped by rags-to-riches myths from the time we are children. Our favorite characters are almost always nobodies who rise from obscurity to become heroes. Luke Skywalker, Frodo Baggins, Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen, Peter Parker and on and on.
2. Everyone who is anyone is noble and good and held back, but eventually proves their resilience and inner goodness.
3. But this story line doesn't line up with the Bible. When we look there, we find that things are more complicated. While the story is ultimately one of glory and redemption, it isn't a straight path of ascent. Frederick Beuchner said it this way:
  - a) "The Gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the news that man is a sinner, to use the old word, that he is evil in the imagination of his heart, that when he looks in the mirror all in a lather what he sees is at least eight parts chicken, phony, slob. That is the tragedy. But it is also the news that he is loved anyway, cherished, forgiven, bleeding to be sure, but also bled for. That is the comedy."
4. This mix of good news and bad news, of tragedy and comedy, is not how most have been taught to think about Jesus' cross. We prefer to fixate on the cross as the vehicle of our salvation, not the instrument of our destruction. But as the Apostle Paul makes clear in his letter to the Romans, the cross cannot be the former if it is not the latter. Before we can claim to be saved by Jesus' death, first we must be willing to accept that we are condemned by it, that our old self with its addiction to evil and desire to occupy God's rightful place has been judged, killed, and buried.

## VIII. Communion

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Scary – Harvard – wrote *Of Beauty and Being Just* – in which she claims that beauty moves us towards justice and generosity. It moves us beyond our being at the center of things. It can bring out not just wonder but kindness and nobility.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:33

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<sup>3</sup> The quote goes on: “or might be; till he’s realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about “criminals” as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he’s got rid of all the dirty self-deception of talking about low types and deficient skulls; till he’s squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat.”

<sup>4</sup> Let me suggest that this part of the central question in the book of Job. That book opens with God and Satan having a conversation, with Satan arguing that Job’s motivation was bad. Satan argued that Job was just using God. Serving him to get things. He said, “If you let him suffer, he’ll dump you like a broker dumps a low performing stock.” The big question in the book becomes, “is Job using God or serving God?”