

Lent Bible Study 4: St Mark's Passion (Part 1)

Mark 14

The Plot to Kill Jesus

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Judas to Betray Jesus

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

The Passover with the Disciples

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room

The whole commemoration of the Exodus: the eating of the lamb, and the time when only unleavened bread could be eaten. Note there are no Pharisees here. Scribes were experts in the Law of Moses, St Mark associates some with the Chief Priests, others with the Pharisees. The Romans tended to work with Roman leaders above local/indigenous elites and assemblies. And they did arrest Jesus during the festivities, a time when people poured into the city (perhaps 3x as many as lived there normally).

In the 4th century, Christians in Jerusalem would go to Bethany during Holy Week to commemorate this visit there: in St John, it is in the house of Mary and Martha. "Reclining at table" suggests a formal meal, and perhaps the *symposium* of the Greeks, where a teacher taught.

Breaking a flask of ointment often happened when used to anoint a corpse.

300 denarii is about a year's wages for a labourer.

Some translations say "you will always have the poor with you". The point is that there will always be people in material (or other kinds of) need, and they will always need real care, not the hypothetical and hypocritical care expressed here. It wasn't that what the guests did was inadequate, it was that they didn't do anything. "What she has done..." but not, in St Mark, her name... "Truly, I say to you..." is *Amen, amen*, I say to you in Greek.

The other evangelists mention Judas's desire for money (Mt 26:15), possession by the devil (Jn 13:27), and desire for personal gain (Acts 1:18).

Suffice to say in these notes that the chronology is confusing: "the first day" is normally the day when the lamb is eaten, not killed. There are various arguments about how to sort it all out, but the straightest line seems to be to keep with tradition's Thursday—Sunday timing. The "you" is singular here, but they aren't imagining that Jesus will eat alone: rather, as the "head of the family" which they constitute. The instructions are the same as finding the colt before Palm Sunday (11:1).

The "guest room" is the same word as St Luke uses which we translate often as "inn", in which there

furnished and ready; there prepare for us.” And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, “Is it I?” He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

Institution of the Lord’s Supper

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Jesus Foretells Peter’s Denial

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.

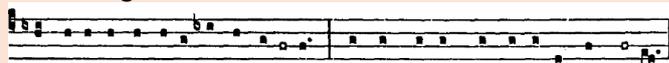
Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

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

was no room at Bethlehem. In view of the massive pilgrim/tourist trade, such C1st AirB&Bs might well have gone to family first. “my guest room” could suggest, at least, that Jesus was well known to the householder (but not to these disciples?). There are consistently narrative additions showing that things happened “just as Jesus told them”, confirming his authority. “Evening” is between sunset and nightfall”. “Reclining” is not how the Exodus instructions (Ex 12:11) go, but it was the Greco-Roman custom. Slaves did not recline, and it is suggested that reclining was a way of showing that the Jews were not slaves (ie because they had been liberated from Egypt). “My companion” (ie one who has shared my bread) betrays me (Pss 41:9, 55:10-11). This is a further cause of lament because of the intimacy of fellowship.

Two important words here: eulogeo (blessing or praising) and eucharisteo (giving thanks). These will go on to be very important in the development of the patterns of Eucharistic Prayer. “For many”, “hyper pollon”, is sometimes said to mean “for the many”, ie not just for those in the room at the moment – rather than for many as in for lots of people but not for everyone. There is a word for “all”, *pantes*, used in the same lines. We might say, the blood is offered to all, but that offer is not accepted by all.

What did they sing? (Part of) the Hallel, Psalms 113-118 (Ps 113 and sometimes 114 come before the meal in some traditions). The tune *could be something like this*:²



1. In éxi-tu Isra-el de Aegý-pto, * dómus Jácob de pópu-lo bárbaro :

The quotation “I will strike...” is Zech 13:7, but as St Mark cites it is neither Septuagint or Masoretic Hebrew.

Gat-shemani means “oil-press”.

Peter, James, and John again: as at the Raising of Jairus’s daughter (5:22-43) and the Transfiguration (9:1-13).

“Quare tristis es, anima mea, et quare conturbas me?” Why are you cast down, my soul; why groan within me? From Ps 42 (throughout) and Ps 43.

² <http://www.synaxis.info/psalom/research/archive/lundberg/PEREGRINE.pdf>

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."

Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

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.

A Young Man Flees

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.

Jesus Before the Council

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

St Paul uses Abba (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6).

"This cup" is often linked with suffering. *Couldn't the Father bring about the kingdom in some other way than the suffering and crucifixion of the Son at the hands of sinners?* For an explanation of why it was fitting that it did happen thus, see St Thomas.³

What is given here as "it is enough" (apechei) may mean "he is being paid off", ie Judas is off being compensated for his betrayal right now, and so the time is about to come, as indeed it does. Still, Jesus invites the disciples to accompany him: "let us be going."

"And immediately" is one of St Mark's classic linking phrases.

"under guard" can also be "securely", ie quickly and without fuss. Is this some kind of concern from Judas for Jesus?

The bystander is Peter (Jn 18:11), but not identified in Mk and Lk. (Why) would Peter have a sword?

"Robber" (lestes) is used for Barabbas (Jn 18:40) and the two men crucified with Jesus. (15:27). It can mean a common bandit but also a revolutionary. "Capture" is the same verb (syllabein) used of Jeremiah in the Septuagint, who is arrested because he is faithful to the proclamation of God's message.

Whoever he is, he is wearing only a linen cloth because he has left everything to follow Jesus. Now, he leaves Jesus, preferring the biblical shame of nakedness over faithfulness.

The High Priest is not named here, but was Caiaphas (High Priest 18-36AD).

The trial is in the house, the others wait in the courtyard. There is a fire: St John adds that it was

³ In sum: 1 We know how much God loves us, and so we love him in return; 2 he sets us an example of obedience and other virtues; 3 because it delivered us from sin and gave us grace; 4 because it stirs us the more to refrain from sin; 5 because as man was overcome by the devil, so the devil was overthrown by man. "It was accordingly more fitting that we should be delivered by Christ's Passion than simply by God's good-will. ST III. Q. 46. Ad 3.

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.

Peter Denies Jesus

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.¹

cold (that is, as well as dark). Later sources say the "whole council" or "great Sanhedrin" needed 71 members, but this may not have been so at this point. St Mark likes to say "everyone was there", without meaning literally everyone. If they want to maintain the pretence of legality, they need the right number of witnesses to be consistent (two or three, according to Deut 19:15). Jesus's silence is in part his refusal to cooperate in an unjust procedure. The Suffering Servant in Isaiah also keep silence (Is 53:7). "The Blessed" is a characteristic way of avoiding the Divine Name (thus "Lord" is said in Hebrew where the Tetragrammaton is written, and other synonyms are used). That such formalities are observed in the midst of injustice is highly ironic. "Son of God" is who St Mark tells us Jesus is at the start of the gospel. "I am" is familiar from St John's Gospel, and here given in the same way: *Ego eimi*. I Am Who [I] Am is God's name given to Moses. Tearing of clothes is a sign of great grief and emotion. In saying what he has said, Jesus has incriminated himself in their eyes. The punishment for blasphemy should have been death by stoning, but they later claim (John 18:31) that they aren't allowed to enact the death penalty (because of Roman law?), and so the Romans must do it instead.

The servant girl does what is called a "double take": she sees Peter and then realises whom she is seeing. Peter's response is one of confusion: he does not know what to say. "And the rooster crowed" is not in all manuscripts. Since there is going to be a second crowing, there must have been a first, so was an original line missed out in some MSS, or did some MSS put in what they felt to be missing? St Matthew says they know Peter is a Galilean because of his accent. The final denial is clear and unambiguous. These two "immediately"s are the last instance of its use in the Gospel.

"Broke down" is translating "epibalon", which may mean "rushed out" or even "beat himself". Klaien, weep, is what the people were doing when they thought Jairus's daughter was dead. It is completely bereft and hopeless.

¹ Bible text is in the ESV, English Standard Version, more or less what we shall have in the new Lectionary for Mass in due course.