



Palm Sunday- B
March 28, 2021
Mark's Passion Narrative

Background on Mark's passion narrative:

Many Scripture scholars suggest that Mark's Gospel is a "passion narrative" with a long prologue. In truth, Mark's account of Christ's public life is brief and moves rapidly toward His death. Mark's passion narrative was actually written first; the oldest part of his Gospel starts with Jesus' arrest at the end of chapter 14 – the "handing over" of Jesus. In a more theological sense, Jesus was not so much "handed over" by Judas, as God the Father allowed it and Jesus concurred. Jesus is not a passive "victim" but chooses freely to accept what is happening (this point is critical to redemption/salvation: even in our own regard, our choice to accept death and dying makes it redemptive).

In the version of the Passion of Mark we hear in Church, great attention is given to two events prior to the arrest: the Last Supper and the anointing of Jesus' head. The Passover meal helps "interpret" the meaning of Christ's Death on the cross and Christ's actual death fulfills the pledge and words of "self-gift" over the bread and the cup. The anointing of His head is a gesture of tenderness but also a sign of His regal identity and it also removes the need for any further anointing at the time of burial.

In the prayer in the garden, Jesus draws strength from His "Abba" (Father/daddy) even as the disciples are three times found sleeping. He is more and more abandoned and alone; the disciples simply do not understand the significance of what is unfolding. But there is a glimmer of hope: Jesus speaks about seeing them in Galilee (the place where it all began). The disciples have not understood the imperative of the cross: no one can "know" Jesus apart from His commitment to the cross. In Mark 14:51-52 there is a unique feature to this passion narrative: a young man (perhaps a would-be disciple?) is about to be apprehended and runs away naked leaving behind a linen cloth (sindona); he represents inadequate discipleship. A curious detail here: the angel at the tomb in Mark 16 is dressed in a linen robe (sindona): some connection here??

In the Jewish interrogation by the Sanhedrin, the crucial question and response is between Jesus and the High Priest: when asked if He is "the Christ," Jesus answers affirmatively and refers to the Son of Man in Daniel 13. This is the first time in Mark that Jesus accepts the title "Christ."

With the Sanhedrin, false testimony is given regarding Jesus' sayings about the temple. Temple was an issue in Mark's Gospel: it had just been destroyed by the Romans around the time Mark was writing. Mark seems to imply God allowed this tragedy because Temple was ritual without real love – of God or neighbors. The veil of the temple is torn in two, top to bottom, when Jesus dies; a sign of God's judgment and concurrently, the Roman centurion declares Jesus truly was the "Son of God." (Remember Mark's Church was in Rome; the centurion represents their courageous witness of faith under persecution.)

Jesus is silent before Pilate. He cries out the opening verses of Psalm 22, "*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me...*" - an expression of trust yet also an admission of Himself feeling the pain of the absence of His Father's consolation.

As Jesus dies, He hands over His spirit with a “loud cry” (or shout). His first miracle had the demon leave the possessed man with a “shout” (same Greek word): Jesus’ whole life was “exorcizing” the world of evil! Mission fulfilled!

Thoughts for prayer and reflection:

- 1) *With the Passion you may want to contemplate certain scenes and images:*
 - *Jesus bound and arrested: hands tied and taken away. Not free physically but spiritually free!*
 - *His words at the supper over bread and cup.*
 - *His prayer in the garden and calling upon “Abba”; thy will be done; disappointment at sleep of disciples.*
 - *Disciple running away naked rather than confess his connection to Jesus.*
 - *Peter’s denial while Jesus is interrogated by Sanhedrin and his tears at what he had done.*

- 2) *Read Psalm 22 in its entirety and feel the full range of emotions from despair to hope.*

- 3) *Think about the promise to meet in Galilee*