ReMARKable: Let Scripture Be Fulfilled (Mark 14) Memory Verse: Mark 14:38

April 13th, 2025 (Palm Sunday) Scripture Reading: Mark 14

Today is Palm Sunday. It marks the beginning of Holy Week. Traditionally we tell the story of how Jesus entered into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey to much celebration. Everyone waved palm branches and shouted, “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” But today, as we are following along with Mark’s gospel, we talked about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem a few weeks ago when Amanda preached on chapter 11.

 So as we approach chapter 14, we want to keep in mind where we have been. Jesus’ whole ministry has been building up to the work he has to do in Jerusalem. Mark has demonstrated for us who Jesus is, the Christ, the Son of God. The One who has authority over sickness and demons, over nature and even over the teachers of the Law. The One who is compassionate, humble and patient. We know who Jesus is and now we are going to see what it is that he must do.

 Chapter 14 is the longest chapter in Mark. It covers a lot of ground and reports on a lot of events. And, if we can, I would like us to walk in the tension between being able to understand and digest what we are reading but also feeling like it is all going too fast, like we want to slow down. I want us to be in that tough spot this morning because that is where the disciples were. The events that unfold in this chapter are like a stone tumbling down a hill. Things escalate quickly, they get out of hand, everyone seems to lose control. So we drink from a firehose here this morning, but maybe that is okay once in a while. I encourage you to keep the chapter open in front of you and follow along as we make our way through.

 Mark opens with a theme of preparation. It is two days before the Passover and Jesus’ enemies, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, are plotting Jesus’ arrest and preparing a way to bring about his demise. The Passover was an obligatory sacred holiday that commemorated God’s dramatic rescue of his people that occurred back in the book of Exodus. God sent ten plauges upon Egypt, the last of which claimed the life of every first born. But the Israelites were spared from ths tragedy. If they were to put the blood of a sacrificed Lamb upon their doorframes, then the angel of death would literally pass over them and they would be safe. This story gave shape to what it meant to be an Israelite. So, if you lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem, you were in town, worshipping at the temple and preparing to share in the Passover meal with family members and other Jews. If you lived far away from the temple, your heart’s desire was to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem at least once in your lifetime. So during this festival, Jewish people from near and far would have been packed into Jerusalem and it’s surrounding suburbs. The Jewish leaders want to get rid of Jesus, but they can’t just move forward with their plans…they need to be clever and sneaky…The public loved Jesus. He was a great prophet in their eyes. If the leaders make their move and word gets out in this over-crowded city, there would be trouble.

 In verse 3 we cut to Jesus who is in Bethany, one of those suburbs of Jerusalem we talked about. He is hanging out with a man Mark refers to as Simon the leper. This is clearly unacceptable behavior that would have made Jesus unclean. And on the cusp of Passover too! But Jesus has already dealt with this issue back in chapter 12. People, places and food are not unclean…we are made unclean by the sin that comes out of our hearts. While eating dinner, the meal is interrupted by an unnamed woman who pours a vile of very expensive perfume upon Jesus’ head. A drop or two would have been customary to show honor to a guest, but she dumps it all! People object to such outlandish waste, but Jesus takes it for what it is. Like the poor widow who gave all she had to the temple treasury, this woman held nothing back. She gave it all to Jesus and in that moment expressed her love for him, an extravagant, uncalculated love. Jesus acknowledges this gesture as an anointing for burial. It is another step in his preparation. He knows full well what is to come….he knew that scripture would be fulfilled. This is a phrase we are going to use a lot this morning. It lays the foundation for Jesus’ actions, it provides the filter we need in order to understand these events. This all comes about so that scripture might be fulfilled.

Verse 10, Mark inserts a word about Judas who is making preparations of his own. He guarantees some money for himself if he betrays Jesus and hands him over to the chief priests.

Verse 12 continues this theme of preparation as the disciples talk with Jesus about where they are planning to eat the Passover meal in an overly packed city with very limited rooms to accommodate their group. But such preparations are barely an inconvenience as all the planning and logistics have somehow been worked out. This has got to be Jesus’ most underestimated miracle.

 That evening they eat the meal together, but for Jesus this celebration has a dark cloud over it. He can’t get the words of Psalm 41:9 out of this mind. “Even my good friend, the one I trusted, who shared my food, has kicked me with his heel – a betrayer!” Jesus announces this reality, and everyone is quick to deny that it could be them. Jesus reiterates that it must be so because the Son of Man must go to his death…so that scripture could be fulfilled.

 Jesus takes the bread and the cup, normal elements that are a part of any meal, and he infuses them with new meaning. The bread is his body broken for us. The wine is his blood shed for us. Jesus establishes a new way, the way of God’s kingdom. Through Jesus, God has forged a new way of relating to humanity. No longer are we bound to the mandates of the Law but, under Christ, we are bound to the mandates of love, self-sacrificial, uncalculated, love. In verse 25 Jesus gives us a picture of this coming kingdom: a banquet in which he will finally drink new wine in a new way. Lamar Williamson observes, “A passage which began by preparing disciples for the death of Jesus ends by pointing them to the glory of his coming kingdom.”

 After a song of praise the group departs for the Mount of Olives. This was the normal retreat spot for Jesus. It was a quiet place just outside the walls of a very bustling city. Jesus shares with his disciples more prophecy that is soon to be fulfilled. Zechariah 13 declares terrible judgements upon Jerusalem and the sin of God’s people. Verse 7 is written from the perspective of God speaking and it says, “Sword, arise against my shepherd, against the man responsible for my community…Strike the shepherd in order to scatter the flock!” Jesus is that shepherd. He must be struck down…let scripture be fulfilled.

 Peter is, of course, sure that he will not flee or cave under pressure. More prophetic words: “You will deny me three times.” Peter promptly doubles down and denies that he will deny…we can see where that is going.

 ((Verse 32 brings us to a place called Gethsemane. And I don’t think Gethsemane is so much a location as it is a landmark on the Mount of Olives. The word Gethsemane literally means olive press. It was a structure that was used to crush olives and to collect the resulting oil. This is precisely what Jesus experiences as he comes alone before his Father to pray. These are the words Mark uses to describe Jesus in these moments: despair, anxious, very sad. He felt as if he were dying. He felt the crushing weight of the work he had come to accomplish. It is clear that Jesus does not want to die, he pleads with God. “All things are possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering!” Surely there is some other way to do this. Surely your plan can come to pass by some other means. Do I really have to do this? But who is Jesus praying to? God. And who is God? His Father. His Abba. In his raw humanity, in his fear and hesitation, in this crushing stress, Jesus knows that, despite all of that, he can trust his Abba. He can trust his Abba so much so that he can in fact utter this sentence: “Not what I want, but what you want.”

 This is the crux of the Christian walk. This is how we deny ourselves, how we take up our cross. First, we must come to a place of trust in our Abba, our heavenly Father. That means we actually trust him more than we trust ourselves. Are his ways better than my own? Are His plans better for me than the ideas I could come up with? Now that is a much different question than, for example, are God’s plans easier for me? Are God’s plans the most efficient? Are they the least time consuming? No, no and no. God’s ways are not our own. We are not asked to understand, we are asked to follow, to trust and obey. That is what Jesus demonstrates here. He trusts. He obeys.)) The disciples, for their part, are sleeping. Jesus longs for their support. In these moments he needs fellowship with God in prayer, but he also needs the fellowship of his friends. It’s not that they can say or do anything to help or to intervene, but, sometimes, merely being present is all that is needed.

 Jesus seems to be taken aback by his friend’s inability to stay alert for even an hour. He declares in verse 38, the spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak. So what do we do about that? Stay alert! Watch and pray! This was the main point of Mark chapter 13. Tough times are coming, stay alert! Watch out! But these disciples have already forgotten that lesson. A total of three times Jesus comes to them only to find them sleeping, finally Judas arrives with an armed mob.

 Judas delivers the treacherous kiss. Jesus speaks to the mob. Verse 49, “Day after day, I was with you, teaching in the temple, but you didn’t arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” Let God’s plan take its ordained course. For Jesus, in this moment, his struggle was already over. He has already had it out with God. He has already gone through the oil press. At this point Jesus has already crucified his own will. He is now ready. He is determined to face all that is to come.

 Take a look at verse 50: “And all the disciples rallied around him and encouraged him….and all the disciples tried to keep the crowd from taking him away….and all the disciples gathered together to form a plan to free Jesus…No….verse 50, “And all the disciples left him and ran away.”

 Throughout Mark’s gospel we have hitched a ride on the discipleship rollercoaster. They have had some great moments of success. Some pretty high points. They have had their share of failures and misunderstandings. But what is this? Total abandonment right at the moment of Jesus’ greatest need? They all left him and ran away? Once again, we see ourselves in the story. There have been times when we have all fled. There have been times when we have forsaken Jesus, when we have given in to fear or pressure or convenience. We are not alone in our failure. But I want to declare to you, none of these fleeing disciples were ultimately condemned. Despite their cowardice, each one was eventually used by God in a mighty way. Each one of them would eventually take up their cross and follow in the way of Jesus. God knows we are going to drop the ball, he knows that we will fail, but he always allows the opportunity for us to come back again. It is the number one characteristic of grace: there is always a second chance. If you ever find yourself running away from the Lord, do not let that be the end of the story. Turn back, take hold of the second chance that grace provides.

 The next scene takes us to the home of the high priest where we have an account of a “trial”. But this so-called trial is out and out illegal and corrupt. According to the rules of the Sanhedrin, that is, the Jewish high court, all seventy one members would gather in their special meeting hall near the temple where they would hear from witnesses as well as defendants. They would only consider accounts that agreed in every detail. Each council member then gave their verdict individually in a highly organized fashion. If they decided that the death penalty was called for, an entire day must elapse before that sentence is carried out just in case someone might have second thoughts or doubts about the verdict. Nothing was done rashly, everything was above board and no, they were not allowed to meet either at night, or during a holy festival. But here they are, dismissing all of these rules. William Barclay spells it out: “In their eagerness to eliminate Jesus, the Jewish authorities did not hesitate to break their own laws.”

 These leaders bend over backwards trying to scrounge up some sort of testimony against Jesus. But stories were not lining up and accusations were vague. They find themselves in the middle of breaking rules and yet they are still trying to put up a mask of obedience. It’s the same old hypocrisy that Jesus has pointed put all along. They have no love for God, and yet they want to appear as though they are not breaking God’s law. They want to pretend they are faithful even as they bring false charges against an innocent man, a flagrant infraction against the ninth commandment.

Jesus remains silent as the lies fly through the room. Finally, the high priest asks, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am” is his answer. *Ego eimi.* Jesus claims to be God and he also applies to himself the title, “Son of Man”, the divine one who will return from heaven in victory.

But the high priest is not interested in any of that. He has heard all he needs to hear. It is blasphemy and Jesus deserves to die. Collectively they begin to spit on him, beat him and mock him. And the words Jesus spoke about himself begin to come true. The Son of Man must be turned over to the hands of men…he will be beaten…he will be killed…let scripture be fulfilled.

Peter is there hanging around, trying to stay in the shadows. But he is noticed and asked if he knows Jesus…three different times followed by three different denials. Then he hears the crowing of a rooster. And Peter realizes what he has done. He has denied his Lord. He breaks down weeping.

Peter is foolishly brave here. Why hang around and risk being implicated with Jesus? Peter is like us…a mix of wise and foolish…good and bad…loyalist and betrayer. Peter waffles and when it comes down to it, when he is challenged, he opts for denial. But again, we will see, this is not the end of Peter’s story. We are the same. When we fumble, it is not the end. Yes, we will always be a mix of sinner and saint, but God in his glorious power can work with that. And, by the second-chance of grace, over time, we become less of a mixture and more of a uniformity. We keep following Christ, in the valleys and on the mountains, we keep following Christ in the doubts and uncertainties, we keep following Christ until he becomes our all in all. Eventually we live out John the Baptist’s declaration: He must become more; I must become less! Let scripture be fulfilled!

As the darkness of Good Friday approaches, let us keep our eyes on the light of Christ who is the I AM, the Son of Man, the Savior of the world, the one through whom scripture has been fulfilled. Amen.