

Mark 14:1-52

Introductory Comments

1. The final events in Mark are carefully plotted over a definite, limited time, in which all that the audience has anticipated since early in the story plays out to its conclusion. The events of Judas' betrayal, the disciples' flight, and Peter's denial are all imminent (though the latter will happen outside the scope of our reading today). The episodes of the supper and Gethsemane are heavily weighted with forebodings of failure. The four scenes composing these episodes alternate dialogue with monologue, and confrontation with command to achieve a kind of interlocking crescendo: 14:17-21 – "Is it I?" → 14:22-26a – "Take" → 14:26b-31 – "I will not" → 14:32-42 – "remain here, and watch." In the remainder of the gospel, there is but one more example of good soil: the woman who anoints Jesus in 14:3-9.
2. Outline of Mark 14:1-52
 - A. 14:1-11 – time reference; death plot; unnamed woman anoints Jesus for burial
 1. 14:1-2 – plot against Jesus
 2. 14:3-9 – unnamed woman anoints Jesus for burial
 3. 14:10-11 – Judas joins plot
 - B. 14:12-26a – the supper
 1. 14:12-16 – prediction and preparation
 2. 14:17-21 – dialogue with disciples on betrayal
 3. 14:22-26a – monologue of institution: bread, cup, hymn
 - C. 14:26b-52 – on the Mount of Olives
 1. 14:26b-31 – dialogue with disciples on falling away
 2. 14:32-42 – monologue in Gethsemane
 3. 14:43-52 – betrayal, arrest, and flight

Questions and read Mark 14:1-52 aloud

Discussion Questions

1. **In 14:1-11, how is the woman's act of anointing one of faith/good soil?** *Unlike the disciples' response, hers is faithful to Jesus' words that he will be killed (which he repeated three times). As noted, this woman's act is the last act of good soil – notice that she is memorialized not because of "who" she is (we never get her name) but "what" she does. Anonymity in service is a hallmark of good soil. Also, the rarity of her faithful act is emphasized narratively by surrounding it with the developing plot against Jesus (14:1-2 and 10-11) and countering the woman's act itself with a controversy over the proper object of generosity (14:4-5). The effect is to show how treacherous it can be to follow Jesus and respond with faith.*
2. **Compare how money is used in 14:4-11. What is Mark saying about how money is properly used?** *Proper use of money is to finance an act of love, ministry,*

or gentleness. Judas illustrates disciples' misappropriation of money (they value it for riches: 10:25-26, 12:41-44).

3. What does Jesus' reply in 14:6-9 mean to you? What is he saying about the nature of poverty and helping those in need? *He isn't saying anything like many of us have been taught. He neither divinely ordains the existence of poverty nor denigrates the importance of helping those in need. His reply indicates that social action on behalf of suffering humanity is not a substitute for personal gestures of love to individuals (and vice versa). Both are part of doing God's will.*

4. Why does Judas betray Jesus? *We aren't told. Such concern is more a convention of modern story. He illustrates or symbolizes one possible consequence of a hardened heart: the betrayal of friends. From a narrative perspective, the contrast between the generosity of the anonymous woman and the deal of Judas ("who was one of the Twelve") with the chief priests dramatizes starkly the different production of good earth and rocky ground. And just as his followers will be later (13:12), Jesus is to be delivered up to death by his "brother" in the family of God, one who was appointed "to be with him" (3:14).*

5. What do you make of Jesus' instructions re: the Passover preparations? Have you heard a story like this already? Why does Mark repeat scenes of Jesus' specific instructions? *The Passover instructions are much like the specific instructions Jesus gives to disciples in Mk 11 regarding the colt. In both cases, the disciples find everything just as Jesus predicted. The detail of both of these interludes evokes the remarkable detail of God's proof to Saul that he was going to be king (1 Samuel 10:1-9), and the effect is to dramatically convey the extent of Jesus' prescience. Both Mark 11 and 14 show how Jesus is a prophet of amazing capability whose words about the future are to be believed and whose orders are to be obeyed.*

6. What do the disciples' reactions in 14:19 and 31 say about them? *The disciples' responses to Jesus' prediction of betrayal and of their scattering depict them as transparent boasters, for in the first instance, each asks if he will be the one to betray while in the second, they all swear to die rather than deny Jesus. If they are not sure whether or not they will betray him, how can they possibly swear faithfulness to death? Their first response undercuts the credibility of their second.*

7. When Jesus takes and breaks the bread with his disciples, what previous themes from the Gospel are brought together? To whom is Jesus speaking? *The themes of bread and feeding have played a major role throughout the Gospel. Feeding the crowds in the wilderness implicitly connected Jesus' mission with Moses and the children of Israel, who were fed manna in the wilderness by a protecting deity. However, those feedings also served to reveal the hardness of heart of the disciples, for they did not understand about the bread (6:52). Here Jesus explicitly relates the broken bread to his body, which will be broken for their sakes and the gospel's. Whether the disciples will be nourished by the metaphorical as well as the literal bread is doubtful, given their past performance, but Jesus' words are also heard by the audience, and hearing him they too have the opportunity for metaphorical enrichment.*
What is ironic about the cup that Jesus and the disciples share? *The fact that*

they drink from the same cup during supper should remind the audience of the inappropriate request of James and John following the third Passion prediction (10:35-40), because Jesus had asked them if they could “drink the cup that I drink” (10:38). Here they indeed drink from the literal cup Jesus uses. However, Jesus’ question to them had not been literal but metaphorical. It is not the cup of wine at supper that Jesus insists they must drink; it is, instead, the “cup” he asks God in Gethsemane to remove from his future (14:36) that he and all his faithful followers must share. Yet, while Jesus is agonizing over that metaphorical cup, James and John along with Peter are fast asleep (14:37). That cup they will not prove able to drink.

8. Read 14:27-31 again. Why is this passage ironic (and even comical)?

*Because as he stridently contradicts Jesus, Peter already denies him twice! **What critical part of this episode do the disciples appear to miss or ignore altogether?** Verse 28 where Jesus says, “After I am raised up I will go before you to Galilee.” They just don’t get it (plus, their confusion concerning “what the rising of the dead meant” (9:10) bodes ill for their ability to share in Jesus’ assurance).*

9. What does 14:32-36 illustrate about Jesus? His humanity. How does 14:32-42 depict a Homeric “hero’s journey”? *Jesus in moment of crisis, with deep emotional gravity, wrestles with his own fears and heart, and proceeds to choose well. This is a common convention in Greek epics (e.g. the Iliad), whereby a character faces a critical moment or battle and is on the verge of giving way to his heart or mind, but pulls himself together with a formulaic line and does the right thing.*

10. In 14:37-38, when Jesus calls Peter “Simon,” it’s the first and only time since naming him “Rock” in 3:16 that Jesus addresses him this way. What is the significance? *Reviving the name “Simon” reminds the audience that the rocky ground was initially fruitful and suggests the possibility of resurrecting that fruitfulness in this final hour. Since Jesus’ prayer resolved his inner conflict, perhaps if the hardened Peter would similarly pray, the fruitful Simon might still succeed. The mention of hour and watching, alluding to the warnings of 13:32-37, underscores the urgency of the moment. Jesus’ closing observation that the spirit is eager but the flesh is weak may well represent may well reflect the author’s basic view concerning why some people who hear the word receive it with joy, endure for a time, and then, when persecutions arise, fall away. They have eager and ready spirits, but they fear for their bodies or their material concerns. The hope that “Simon” might emerge from the rock of Peter dies stillborn, however, as Jesus leaves and returns a ritualized three times to find only sleeping disciples who neither watch nor pray.*

11. What is the symbolism of being “betrayed by a kiss?” *To be betrayed by something that represents intimacy and affection is an apt image for the relationship between Jesus and the disciples in Mark. Those who are closest, best known and cared for, fail most miserably. Turning a sign of love into a sign of death is the result of hard-heartedness and fear.*

12. What do you think the young man who runs away naked in 14:51-52 represents? *The scene of betrayal involves three distinct actions on the part the disciples, all of which are consequences of a hardened heart. As we have seen, Judas*

represents "betrayal." Then, this young man, who is a symbolic representation of the disciples, represents "flight." As the going gets tough the disciples' true colors are laid bare and they flee. The last action is done by Peter, in his famous three-fold denial. But we'll get to that next session...

**** For next session read Mark 14:53-15:24*