

## Mark Chapters 14, 15, and 16

These are three VERY involved chapters that reflect our observation of Holy Week at Plymouth. You'll hear some of Mark's gospel at our Maundy Thursday Tenebrae service at 7:00, our Good Friday midday service, and on Easter Sunday.

**Chapter fourteen** opens with conspiracy among the religious authorities to kill Jesus, which tragically has played into antisemitism across the ages. It is vital to note that the Romans, after trying him, executed Jesus in their own (very non-Jewish) manner: crucifixion. The scene shifts to the home of Simon the leper in Bethany, where a female disciple anoints Jesus' feet with expensive ointment. The other disciples hold a scarcity view in criticizing her, but Jesus affirms her action, saying, "What she has done will be told in remembrance of **her**." (Note that Jesus' statement, "Do this in remembrance of me" doesn't occur in Mark's gospel but does in Luke 22 and I Corinthians 11.) Jesus does celebrate the Lord's Supper in an upper room without the words of institution we hear every time we celebrate communion. Judas agrees to betray Jesus, and Peter's threefold denial is foretold.

Jesus prays in Gethsemane and the disciples are not able to stay awake, as he has instructed them. As he is speaking to them, a crowd with swords and clubs approaches, Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss (see the image by Giotto in the accompanying video), and one of Jesus' followers cuts the ear off the one of those who have come to arrest Jesus. (Luke has Jesus heal the earless victim, and Matthew give Jesus the famous line, "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword," but Mark is characteristically succinct.) Jesus is dragged by an armed crowd to religious authorities who initially find nothing to pin on Jesus, but then they ask him if he is the messiah, and he says, "I am," which is odd, since throughout the gospel Jesus perpetuates the "messianic secret," which to me sounds like having a Clark Kent-like secret identity. The chapter ends with Peter's threefold denial.

**Chapter 15** opens the next morning, and the Roman collaborators (religious authorities) hand Jesus over to the governor Pilate, who asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews. . . which is the first time that title is mentioned in Mark's gospel. Jesus gives an evasive response, "You say so." That is the end of Pilate's questioning. (Herod doesn't appear in Mark's version.) The crowd asks to free one prisoner in celebration of Passover, Jesus or Barabbas, and they cry out for Jesus' crucifixion. Roman soldiers enter the scene, mocking Jesus as the King of the Jews by dressing him in a purple cloak and pushing a crown of thorns onto his head. The soldiers lead him out to crucify him. Mark's telling does not include Jesus carrying his own cross, but rather having Simon of Cyrene carry his cross. The troops put a tabulum (a small sign) over Jesus' head as they crucified him reading "INRI" or *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum*, Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews. The crucifixion began at 9:00 in the morning, Jesus is derided and jeered by the crowd, and the land is cloaked in darkness from noon until 3:00. Jesus cries out, quoting Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Mark's crucifixion scene ends with a centurion (A Gentile! A Roman!) announcing the startling realization that Jesus was "God's son." While the male disciples abandoned Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses (and Jesus??), and Salome look on from a distance.

After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for Jesus' body, and gets the governor's consent. Joseph wraps Jesus' body in linen and puts him in a tomb cut out of stone, and rolls a

stone against the entrance to the tomb, observed by the two Marys. The next day is Saturday, the sabbath, and no action occurs.

**Chapter 16** begins after the sabbath with the three women who had stayed by Jesus throughout the crucifixion heading off to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices. They arrive and notice that the stone had been rolled back from the opening, and as they enter they see a young man clothed in white (an angel?) who knows they are looking for Jesus and tells the women not to be afraid and to go tell the disciples that Jesus has gone ahead of them to Galilee (about 80 miles north of Jerusalem).

Where does the gospel end? Some sources leave it right there at the end of verse 8, while a "shorter ending" (added at least 200 years after the gospel was written) has the women share the news of resurrection with Peter and the other disciples. The "longer ending" is earlier than the "shorter ending," but the earliest papyrus manuscripts of Mark's gospel **omit either ending**. The "longer ending" includes appearances to Mary Magdalene, two unnamed disciples, and finally to the eleven (minus Judas), and Jesus charges them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news."

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. As you have read through the Gospel of Mark, what is your impression of the male disciples? How do you perceive them and their role in these final three chapters of Mark?
2. When we think about the passion (suffering), crucifixion, and resurrection, we often conflate the different gospel stories. (We do that at Christmas, too!) In reading Mark's account – the earliest of the four canonical gospels – what strikes you by what is omitted and included? Has it ever occurred to you that none of the gospel accounts describe what actually happens to Jesus at the moment of resurrection?

### **Putting It into Practice:**

Resurrection is not just a one-off experience for Jesus...it is a clarion call that God triumphs over the powers and principalities, the death-dealing forces of empire, those who ignore the realm of God. As you experience Holy Week, keep your eyes and heart open to the people and forces around you that echo God's YES! to Jesus and the power of love and resurrection. And give thanks for them!



### **Three Minutes of Giotto's Images of Holy Week**

On my last sabbatical, I spent a few wonderful days in Padua (Padova) just west of Venice. I had been wanting to visit the Scrovegni Chapel there for years, because it is a masterpiece of proto-Renaissance art created in approximately 1304-5 by Giotto di Bondone. I have created a three-minute video with images of Holy Week. I hope you notice what Giotto does with the facial expressions of the characters you've been reading about. His is sometimes called the father of Renaissance art. Enjoy!

### **Link to Video**

You may need to go back to the email for the clickable image of Giotto to take you to the YouTube video. Or you can copy and paste this link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Uif-\\_ksqTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Uif-_ksqTA)