

THE PASSION NARRATIVES - MARK AND JOHN

1 General introduction

Our Sunday Gospel readings are divided into three cycles. Year A for Matthew. Year B for Mark. Year C for Luke. St John's gospel is read during all three cycles, especially during Lent and Easter season. In Holy Week the Passion narratives are read on Passion (Palm) Sunday and on Good Friday. Passion (Palm Sunday) we hear Matthew year A, Mark year B, and Luke year C. St John's account of the Passion is read every year on Good Friday.

The Passion Narrative is introduced as the Passion of our Lord according to Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. It is the Passion story from their viewpoint. They wrote for different audiences/communities and emphasise different aspects of the truth in order to reach out to the needs of their respective audiences/communities.

The life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus was first preached and then written down (see 01 Formation of the Gospels where this is developed). St Mark's Gospel was written after the Fall of Jerusalem, 70 C.E (Christian Era) and St John's Gospel at the turn of the century (90-100 C.E.). The church grew and developed initially within Judaism, but gradually became increasingly different and separated from the synagogue. In some places the Christians were driven out of the synagogue and very often the opponents of Jesus are identified with those whom the Christians 30, 40, 50 years later regard as opponents. If these Christians were gentiles they may speak of those opponents as Jews and so you find in John that the Jews are opposed to Jesus. What happened earlier in the 30's has been translated to the life situation of the Christians in the 60's, 90s and in later history that was repeated and was made into opposition between Christians and Jews down the centuries. So we must be very careful when we hear the passion stories that we do not hear them in an anti-Jewish way.

Remember that Jesus was Jewish, his disciples were Jewish, the authorities were Jewish so if there was antagonism towards him it was not Jewish antagonism towards Christians. These were struggles of people of the same background, from the same religious family who were in opposition to Jesus, and there was opposition. People had different motives for being opposed to Jesus. It was not just the religious authorities who were opposed to Jesus. He was supposed to have spoken against the temple. A lot of people were employed working on temple renovation. There was the hospitality sector supplying food, and lodging for pilgrims. Any threat to the temple could touch those people. They could also be upset for religious reasons because there was the sacred building and if Jesus as a prophet was saying it was going to be destroyed that could threaten religion and also threaten economy, so in opposition to a figure like Jesus there could be a whole complexity of motives.

The Christian view of the Passion: *The Passion is a drama of God's loving mercy in Christ. That is the way to see it and that is how it should be preached.*

2 John and the Synoptic Gospels:

John's Gospel has a different presentation and vision of Jesus to the synoptic gospels. In the Synoptics (Mark, Matthew, Luke) Jesus goes to Jerusalem once. In Mark (& Matthew, Luke) there is a concentration of hostility to Jesus in Jerusalem, during the passion. In John's gospel he goes back and forth to Jerusalem and Galilee. John's passion doesn't collect all the hostility to Jesus in Jerusalem but it is spread throughout the gospel which may be truer. Mark has simplified things. Several of the

questions that are raised in the synoptic gospels during the passion – whether he is the Messiah, Son of God, whether he is going to destroy the Temple sanctuary - are found scattered in John. Another Factor – John’s Jesus has come down from heaven and he knows all things. The very first mention of Judas, long before the passion, we hear that Jesus knows that he is going to betray him (John 6:64). And at the last supper he knows that he is going to betray him (John 13:37). Jesus is in control of all things. Speaking about the good shepherd he says: “I lay down my life in order to take it up again, no one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again (John 10:17-18) And that is what governs John’s passion. He is not a victim. He is stronger than the forces against him and he controls them. There is a very different picture of Jesus portrayed in Mark’s gospel.

3 Our involvement in the passion narrative

In the Passion narratives it is not just Jesus alone who is important. All the surrounding characters involved in the Passion Narratives have their place in the story. So when Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane we hear not only about Jesus, but a lot of the scene is taken up with the disciples. As we listen to the story of the Twelve, Jesus’ disciples and followers, we hear a tale of their failure - leaving Jesus, denying and betraying him. They wanted to follow Jesus – but on their conditions. Jesus is arrested and brought before Jewish authorities, but again a lot of time is spent on Peter denying Jesus at the same time that Jesus is confessing who he is before the High Priest.

In John’s account of Jesus before Pilate a great deal of time is spent on those outside and what is going to happen to Pilate in this scene. And again, when Jesus is hanging on the cross, we are told very little about Jesus but a great deal about the passers-by, those who are present, how they react, how they are affected by it.

During Holy Week when the passion is read the Church encourages us to bring people into the story so that along with Jesus you have the reader, the priests, the crowd, the disciples, the Roman Governor etc as participants somewhat like a stage drama of the passion. It is meant to draw people into the story. In other words, we are meant to ask ourselves where we would be in the narration of the Passion. We are meant to ask ourselves “where would you be in the Passion Story?” Don’t presume you would be faithful. Listen to the story of the Twelve, Jesus’ disciples and followers. Theirs is a tale of leaving Jesus, denying and betraying him. Listen to the crowd, the religious leaders. Jesus was offensive to religious figures of his time as well as political figures. Do we have any guarantee that he would not be found offensive to the religious people of our time? Jerusalem was a tourist/pilgrim centre and those involved in ‘hospitality’ may have been afraid of Jesus and offended by him and who perhaps thought they were doing a service in handing him over to the authorities. Some were indifferent to Jesus – In John’s gospel Pilate tries not to get involved. Would you be one of the indifferent?

As you listen to the passion ask yourself: “Where do I fit into the story of the passion?”

4 Context for Mark’s Passion Narrative

Mark is writing for a people who are suffering and being persecuted. He emphasizes opposition to Jesus right through the gospel story. He also emphasizes Jesus’ humanity. Jesus suffered but was faithful.

Mark’s gospel written after the fall of Jerusalem around 70 C.E. It was a time of persecution. Followers of Jesus were being excluded from synagogues, there were problems with the new growing numbers of gentiles joining and their relationship with the Jewish tradition, Nero was in Rome and Christians were being persecuted. Mark wrote for a community that had very recently experienced a

sharp and devastating persecution. Some Christians died a martyr's death, others lost faith, denied their faith and in other cases, some Christians turned in other Christians. There were Jew/Greek divisions. Some who were believers were tempted to deny Christ in order to avoid suffering. They were asking the 'why' of suffering. It is in this sort of context that Mark tells the story of Christ.

Mark seems particularly designed to address failure in community leadership. Keyed up in expectation of Jesus' imminent return as Son of Man and judge of the world, the community felt dismay and disillusionment at the seemingly endless postponement of that return despite the presence of signs and portents suggesting it to be close at hand, notably the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman armies in 70 C.E. Cut off from the synagogue and Temple, they have made their houses the place of worship where they experience the presence and power of Jesus. Mark's gospel also, particularly in the way it presents the male disciples of Jesus, appears to address a situation in which leadership has failed, in which family life, in particular, has been torn apart by persecution, and in which women have done better than men in coping with the suffering that was inevitable for those following Jesus.

5 Mark's passion

Mark's presentation of the passion is the darkest the most agonizing... with only occasional light. We see the tragedy of the passion. The passion story begins after the last supper with Jesus and the disciples having sung a hymn going to the mount of olives. Jesus first words to his disciples: "You will all lose faith for scripture says I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." These are shattering words for the disciples. To be scattered at the passion and to lose faith. At the supper Jesus has already told them that one would hand him over, betray him. Peter objects saying that even if all lose faith he will not, only to be told that he will deny Jesus three times that very night. So we get a presentation where one (we know it is Judas) will betray him, all will be scattered, and Peter will deny him three times. These dire predictions are fulfilled as at the same time Jesus stands before the Jewish authorities witnessing to the truth.

Mark gives us a stark picture of Jesus' suffering. He stresses the humanity of Christ, the Jesus who did not want to die but followed his Father's will rather than his own safety. Mark is inviting his audience (and us) to choose fidelity and to trust in the God who was with Jesus even in death when Jesus felt deserted ("My God, my God, why have you deserted me?")

Some points coming in Mark's presentation:

- That Jesus' messiahship involves suffering. Suffering is part of life – both for Jesus and his followers.
- That Jesus cannot be understood as the Messiah/Christ apart from the mystery of the cross.
- The disciples do not understand Jesus or his message. They desert him leaving him alone on the cross. *After his resurrection Jesus tells the women to tell his disciples he will meet them (as promised) in Galilee. They are unfaithful (Mark 16:08). Jesus is faithful and forgiving.*
- It is only on the cross that Jesus is finally recognised (Not in the glory moments of his life) – and he is recognised by a Pagan Roman Centurion
- And yet as Jesus breathes his last, God acts to confirm his Son. The trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin had concerned Jesus' threat to destroy the Temple and his claim to be the Messianic Son of the Blessed One. At Jesus death we hear that a) the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Jesus is now the new sanctuary and b) The Gentile Roman soldier says: "truly this was God's son."

- After the cross it is possible to see that Jesus was not a false prophet. For Mark, only on the cross is the divine sonship of God revealed. This is the kind of Son of God he is. In Mark, Jesus is depicted as Son of God, Messiah/ King when he looks least like it – on the cross.

6 Context for John's Gospel.

John was writing at the end of the century for people who were looking for the risen Christ. John wants his audience to see the risen Christ in their daily lives and so keeps the vision of the risen Christ before them in his Gospel. John, unlike the synoptic gospels, emphasises the divinity of Christ from the very beginning of his Gospel.

- John's Gospel is very different to the synoptic gospels (Matthew Mark, Luke) where Jesus is ministering in Galilee and goes to Jerusalem for the final week of his earthly life. In John Jesus is going back and forth to Jerusalem.

- Questions that are asked in the synoptic gospels during the passion narrative are asked throughout John's gospel e.g. Is Jesus the Messiah? Is he going to destroy the Temple?

- John emphasizes the divinity of Jesus. (Prologue is a summary of his gospel) He has come down from heaven and: **[a] knows all things and [b] is in control of all things**

[a] Jesus knows all things:

"John 6:5: Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' 6:6 He only said this to test Philip; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. 6:64 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him."

And Jesus speaks of his 'hour'.

1. [7:30] Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.
2. [8:20] He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.
3. [12:23] Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.
4. [13:1] Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.
5. See also John 2:4, 12:27, 17:1

[b] Jesus is in control of all things

Jesus is not a victim. He controls events in John as opposed to Mark's gospel.

The scripture verse that is the outline for John's passion narrative is 10:17: John's Jesus has come down from heaven. He knows all things and is in control of all things.

John 10:17 "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 10:18 No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my Father." That is what dominates John's passion - a Jesus who is in control, who is stronger than the forces against him and he controls them. It is a very different picture from Mark's Jesus.

7 PASSION NARRATIVE - Mark and John

John's Passion Narrative on Good Friday begins with Jesus and the disciples going to the garden of Gethsemane (18:1ff).

Mark's Passion Narrative on Passion (Palm) Sunday begins earlier telling us of the preparation for the last supper, anointing at Bethany, followed by the last supper and Jesus foretelling the disciples of their betrayal. (14:1- 31). Commentaries on this section are given in the gospel notes.

I have dealt here where Mark parallels with John's gospel – entry into the garden of Gethsemane.

Mark

Mark's Passion Narrative is well organised and planned. It will help to see it in 4 acts

Act 1 – Jesus at Gethsemane in the Mount of Olives

There are two scenes here:

- 1] his prayer
- 2] his arrest

Act 2 – Jesus taken before the Jewish authorities and put on trial

Here there are also two scenes.

- 1] The Trial – Jesus in dialogue with his accusers
- 2] Peter is simultaneously denying Jesus

Act 3 – The Roman Trial where Jesus faces Pontius Pilate

Act 4 – the Crucifixion and burial of Jesus

Two scenes

- 1] The crucifixion and death of Jesus
- 2] the burial of Jesus

Act 1 – Jesus at Gethsemane in the Mount of Olives

- 1 His Prayer

Mark: Passion Text

14: 26 -42 [After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them 'You will all lose faith, for the scripture says: "I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered". However, after my resurrection I shall go before you to Galilee.' Peter said 'Even if all lose faith, I will not.' And Jesus said to him, 'I will tell you solemnly, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times.' But he repeated still more earnestly 'If I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And they all said the same.]

They came to a small estate called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, 'Stay here while I pray.' Then he took Peter and James and John with him. And a sudden fear came over him, and great distress. And he said to them, 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here, and keep awake.' And going on a little further he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, this hour might pass him by. He said 'Abba (Father)! Everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it.' He came back and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, 'Simon are you asleep? Had you not the strength to keep awake one hour? You should awake, and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came back and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy; and they could find no answer for him. He came back a third time and said to them, 'You can sleep on now and take your rest. It is all over. The hour has come. Now the Son on Man is to be betrayed in to the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is close at hand already.'

Comment: *Jesus appears differently in each of the passion stories. Mark's passion is a very difficult passion for Jesus. He comes into the mount of olives and after predicting what will happen to the disciples he moves into Gethsemane and says to the body of his disciples "Sit here while I pray." Then he takes with him Peter, James and John – and he says "My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here, and keep awake." He goes forward by himself and falls on the earth. Why did he take Peter, James and John with him? They were with him at key moments in his life – the Transfiguration and with Jairus, whose daughter was raised – but more than that these were disciples who said they would remain faithful. James and John wanted to sit at his right and left in the kingdom and Jesus asked them if they could take of his cup and be baptised with his baptism, and they said they could [10:39]. and we see them fail. Peter has just said "Even if all lose faith, I will not." He too fails dramatically. These are chosen to remind us of disciple's failure.*

Prayer of Jesus: *What is particularly interesting in Mark is the prayers of Jesus. 'Abba! Everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it.' He challenged his disciples if they could drink the cup and now he himself was to drink and now prays to have the cup removed from him. This is a testing. This is true anguish. "Take this cup away." He is being tested by death, the last great struggle of Jesus life. Jesus, the human Jesus who is distraught and fearful, prays that this cup will pass but accepts his Fathers will.*

Mark has Jesus pray in his own language, Aramaic, both here and on the cross (Abba / Eloi Eloi on the cross).

These verses from the Epistle to the Hebrews describe Mark's Jesus.

"5:7 During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had the power to save him out of death, and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard. 5:8 Although he was Son, he learnt to obey through suffering; 5:9 but having been made perfect, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation"

Comment on John's Passion Text

"Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kedron valley. There was a garden there, and he went into it with his disciples. Judas the traitor knew the place well, since Jesus had often met his disciples there, and he brought the cohort to this place together with a detachment of guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees, all with lanterns and torches and weapons." John 18:1-3

John's Gospel does not have Jesus praying or distraught in the Garden. We find the prayer that Mark has in the garden of Gethsemane earlier in John's Gospel, but in different form. It is not a prayer of petition. For John, Jesus has now reached his hour of glory, of being lifted up, of returning to the Father. This prayer is found in John 12:27 "Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. 12:28 Father, glorify your name!' A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' 12:29 People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, 'It was an angel speaking to him'. 12:30 Jesus answered, 'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. 12:31 'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. 12:32 And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself."

In the Garden of Gethsemane John has no prayer –for John, Jesus insists on drinking the cup because Jesus knows all things and is in control and this is his hour of glory. His prayer is 'Father glorify your name' not 'thy will be done' as in Mark because he and the Father are one. Jesus is not a suppliant asking to be relieved from death. He goes to the garden and he is in control.

Act 1 In Gethsemane/ Mount of Olives

2 Arrest

As you read Mark and John's accounts you will see that they are quite different.

Mark: 18:43-52 Even while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came up with a number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the traitor had arranged a signal with them. He said 'The one I kiss, he is the man. Take him in charge and see he is well guarded when you lead him away.' So when the traitor came, he went straight up to Jesus and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. The others seized him and took him in charge. Then one of the bystanders drew his sword and struck out at the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus spoke, 'Am I a brigand that you had to set out to capture me with swords and clubs? I was among you teaching in the Temple day after day and you never laid hands on me. But this is to fulfil the scriptures.' And they all deserted him and ran away. A young man who followed him had nothing on but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the cloth in their hands and ran away naked.

John: 18:1-11 Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kedron valley. There was a garden there, and he went into it with his disciples. Judas the traitor knew the place well, since Jesus had often met his disciples there, and he brought the cohort to this place together with a detachment of guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees, all with lanterns and torches and weapons. Knowing everything that was going to happen to him, Jesus then came forward and said, 'Who are you looking for?' They answered, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' He said, 'I am [he].' Now Judas the traitor was standing among them. When Jesus said 'I am he', they moved back and fell to the ground. He asked them a second time, 'Who are you looking for?' They said, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' Jesus replied, 'I have told you that I am he. If I am the one you are looking for, let these others go.' This was to fulfil the words he had spoken, 'Not one of those you gave me have I lost.' Simon Peter, who carried a sword, drew it and wounded the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back in its scabbard; am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

Comment: In Mark Judas comes and he has a signal, - the kiss, so that they won't arrest wrong person in the darkness. Jesus is silent at this point in Mark and also when the servant's ear is cut off. He tells his arresters that they have come out at night, by stealth, as if they were arresting a man of violence. Yet they made no move against him when he was teaching, in broad daylight, in the Temple. With these words Jesus unmask the impotence of the authorities to counter his true authority, and their need, because of his popularity with the crowd, to have recourse to violence and stealth at night. They arrest him and take him away.

In John The arrest is also different from the other gospels where Judas points out Jesus and delivers him with a kiss. In John Jesus goes to the garden and awaits the people he knows are coming and asks: "Whom do you seek?" They say "Jesus of Nazareth" and he says "I Am" (he). He uses an expression that in the Greek Old Testament is used as a divine name. The arresting party fall to the ground. Roman Soldiers and Jewish police levelled by the power of Jesus. In Mark Jesus falls to the ground in prayer, in John it is the arresters who fall. Neither Roman nor Jewish power have control over Jesus.

And in the scene of the cutting off of the high priest servant's ear, Mark tells us it was cut off, (Matthew, Luke tells us it was cut off by a disciple), John tells us Simon Peter did it. And Jesus rebukes Peter. He wants to drink the cup. He is control. He says to those who came they can arrest him but first they must let the others go.

Summary:

In Mark:

- 1 Judas comes and points out Jesus to the mob
- 2 Jesus is seized and taken away
- 3 The disciples flee

In John

- 1 In John there is no prayer in the garden. Jesus goes to meet Judas and the crowd
- 2 Jesus knows everything that is going to happen to him
- 3 Jesus asks who they are looking for. When he says I AM (HE) they fall back. The Divine name. They cannot arrest him until he allows it to happen.
- 4 Jesus tells them to let the others go –. He arranges the fate of his disciples. Jesus is in control of events.
- 5 It is Peter (in John) who cuts off the high priest servant's ear

Act 2 – Jesus taken before the Jewish authorities and put on trial

Here there are also two scenes.

- 1] The Trial – Jesus in dialogue with his accusers
- 2] Peter is simultaneously denying Jesus

Mark

14:53-65 They led Jesus off to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes assembled there. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the high priest's palace, and was sitting with the attendants warming himself at the fire. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus on which they might pass the death-sentence. But they could not find any. Several, indeed, brought false evidence against him, but their evidence was conflicting. Some stood up and submitted this false evidence against him, 'We heard him, "I am going to destroy this Temple made by human hands, and in three days build another, not made by human hands".' But even on this point their evidence was conflicting. The high priest then stood up before the whole assembly and put this question to Jesus, 'Have you no answer to that? What is this evidence these men are bringing against you?' But he was silent and made no answer at all. The high priest put a second question to him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' Jesus said 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with clouds of heaven.' The high priest tore his robes, and said, 'What witnesses have we now? You heard the blasphemy. What is your finding?' And they all gave their verdict: he deserved to die. Some of them started spitting at him and, blindfolding him, began hitting him with their fists and shouting 'Play the prophet!' And the attendants rained blows on him.

Comment: Sequence of events: *The High priest questions Jesus: "Are you the Christ?" Jesus answer "I am." Then mockery by those present follows.*

The same pattern will follow when Jesus is before Pilate. Pilate questions Jesus and this is followed by mockery of the soldiers present.

Jesus is brought before the gathering of the chief priests. Mark simplifies it so that you will remember it. Chief priest asks a key question “are you the messiah, son of the blessed one, son of God,”. And then the mockery of Jesus because of his claim. Then the Roman governor asks Jesus “are you the king of the Jews” followed by a roman mockery of Jesus. Both trials are set up exactly the same way. Main person asking Jesus key question to let you know what the issue was, followed by the mockery of Jesus. Mark has simplified it, but in John it is much more complicated and spread over a longer period of time.

a. Peter’s denial

Mark

14:66-72 While Peter was down below in the courtyard, one of the high priest's servant-girls came up. She saw Peter warming himself there, stared at him and said 'You too were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.' But he denied it saying, 'I do not know, I do not understand, what you are talking about.' And he went out into the forecourt. The servant-girl saw him and again started telling the bystanders, 'This fellow is one of them.' But again he denied it. A little later the bystanders themselves said to Peter, 'You are one of them for sure! Why, you are a Galilean.' But he started calling curses on himself and swearing, 'I do not know the man you speak of.' At that moment the cock crew for the second time, and Peter recalled how Jesus had said to him, 'Before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times.' And he burst into tears.

Comment:

While Jesus is confessing that he is the messiah, son of the blessed one before the High Priest, Peter is denying him. 1] At first Peter says “I don’t understand” – this is a ploy for getting out of it. 2] When it persists, he denies it, and 3] last of all he says “I don’t even know that fellow”, denying he knows Jesus. Mark is dragging out the horror of what Peter has done. And at that very moment Jesus is before the authorities confessing what Peter should be confessing that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of the blessed. Keep in mind the context of Mark’s gospel. It was written for those suffering persecution. Many of the disciples / followers in the community to whom Mark is writing would have denied being a Christian.

JOHN

1] The Trial – Jesus in dialogue with his accusers

2] Peter simultaneously is denying Jesus

18:12-27 The cohort and its captain and the Jewish guards seized Jesus and bound him. They took him first to Annas, because Annas was the father in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had suggested to the Jews, 'It is better for one man to die for the people.' Simon Peter, with another disciple, followed Jesus. This disciple, who was known to the high priest, went with Jesus into the high priest's palace, but Peter stayed outside the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who was keeping the door, and brought Peter in. The maid on duty at the door said to Peter, 'Aren't you another of that man's disciples?' He answered, 'I am not.' Now it was cold, and the servants and guards had lit a charcoal fire and were standing there warming themselves; so Peter stood there too, warming himself with the others.

The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly for all the world to hear; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple where all the Jews meet together: I have said nothing in secret. But why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught: they know what I said.' At these words, one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face, saying, 'Is this the way to answer the high priest?' Jesus replied, 'If there is something wrong in what I say, point it out; But if there is no offence in it, why do you strike me?' Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

As Simon Peter stood there warming himself, someone said to him, 'Aren't you another of his disciples?' He denied it saying, 'I am not.' One of the high priest's servants, a relation of the man whose ear had been cut off, said, 'Didn't I see you in the garden with him?' Again Peter denied it and at once a cock crew.

Comment: Notice in John how Jesus stands up to those in authority and challenges them. He is not silent as in Mark. Notice the way John tells of Peter's denials – one by one. As Jesus is standing up for the truth, Peter is denying him.

In the Jewish scene John is different because he has no Sanhedrin trial on the night before his death. There was a meeting of the Sanhedrin long before hand, Jesus wasn't even there but the high priest wanted Jesus to die and they agreed that he should die (John 11:45ff) Mark has the Jewish Trial and the Roman trial very closely paralleled. John has the Jewish trial beforehand and there is only an interrogation by the high priest Annas about Jesus and his disciples. The 2nd act in John is much abridged. An interrogation by a high priest, no witnesses, no decision and then the trial before Pontius Pilate.

Act 3 – The Roman Trial where Jesus faces Pontius Pilate

MARK

15:1-20 First thing in the morning, the chief priests together with the elders and scribes, in short, the whole Sanhedrin, had their plan ready. They had Jesus bound and took him away and handed him over to Pilate.

Pilate questioned him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' He answered, 'It is you who say it.' And the chief priests brought many accusations against him. Pilate questioned him again, 'Have you no reply at all? See how many accusations they are bringing against you! But, to Pilate's amazement, Jesus made no further reply.

Comment: (Mark has two questions asked of Jesus. High Priest: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Pilate: "are you the king of the Jews.")

At festival time Pilate used to release a prisoner for them, anyone they asked for. Now a man called Barabbas was then in prison with the rioters who had committed murder during the uprising. When the crowd went up and began to ask Pilate the customary favour, Pilate answered them, 'Do you want me release for you the king of the Jews?' For he realised it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over. The chief priests, however, had incited the crowd to demand that he should release Barabbas for them instead. Then Pilate spoke again. 'But in that case, what am I to do with the man you call king of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Why? What harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate,

anxious to placate the crowd, released Barabbas for them and, having ordered Jesus to be scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led him away to the inner part of the palace, that is, the Praetorium, and called the cohort together. They dressed him up in purple, twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed and spat on him; and they went down on their knees to do him homage. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple and dressed him in his own clothes.

JOHN

18:27-40 They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was now morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves or they would be defiled and unable to eat the passover. So Pilate came outside to them and said, 'What charge do you bring against this man?' They replied, 'If he were not a criminal, we would not be handing him over to you.' Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves, and try him by your own law.' The Jews answered, 'We are not allowed to put a man to death.' This was to fulfil the words Jesus had spoken indicating the way he was going to die.

Comment: *As "the Jews" struggle to maintain their ritual purity on the occasion of the Passover, they do not enter the Praetorium, and at the same time they seek the death of the Lamb of God.*

There are seven brief scenes with Pilate inside the Praetorium and then outside with "the Jews". These 'inside', 'outside' movements are highlighted in red. They help highlight a Pilate in John's Gospel who is fearful, weak and trying to make up his mind. Pilate has to go outside to talk to the people and inside to talk to Jesus and this dramatizes a man "in between" two positions.

We see that although Jesus is the one supposed to be on trial, it is Pilate who is on trial. Jesus is the one asking questions of Pilate. Will Pilate face the truth? Notice the whole section dealing with Pilate in John. He is someone who will not face up to the truth, who does not want to make correct decision.

18:27-40 They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was now morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves or they would be defiled and unable to eat the passover. **So Pilate came outside to them** and said, 'What charge do you bring against this man?' They replied, 'If he were not a criminal, we would not be handing him over to you.' Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves, and try him by your own law.' The Jews answered, 'We are not allowed to put a man to death.' This was to fulfil the words Jesus had spoken indicating the way he was going to die. **So Pilate went back into the Praetorium** and called Jesus to him, and asked 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others spoken to you about me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? It is your people and the chief priests who have handed you over to me: what have you done?' Jesus replied, 'Mine is not a kingdom of this world: If my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent me being surrendered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this kind.' Pilate said, 'So you are a King then?' Jesus answered, 'It is you who say it. Yes, I am a King, I was born for this, I came into the world for this; to bear witness to my truth, and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.' Pilate said, 'Truth, what is that?' And with that **he went out again to the Jews** and said, 'I find no case against him. but according to custom of yours, I should release one prisoner at the Passover; would you like me,

then, to release the king of the Jews?' At this they shouted, 'Not this man, but Barabbas.' Barabbas was a brigand.

19:1-16 Pilate then had Jesus taken away and scourged; and after this, the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head, and dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him and saying, 'Hail King of the Jews!' and they slapped him in the face.

Pilate came outside again and said to them, 'Look, I am going to bring him out to you to let you see that I find no case.' Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said, 'Here is the man.' When they saw him the chief priests and the guards shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him, I can find no case against him.' The Jews replied, 'We have a Law, and according to the Law he ought to die, because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

When Pilate heard them say this his fears increased. **Re-entering the Praetorium, he said to Jesus,** 'Where do you come from?' But Jesus made no answer. Pilate then said to him, 'Are you refusing to speak to me? Surely you know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?' Jesus replied 'You would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above; that is why the one who handed me over to you has the greatest guilt.'

From that moment Pilate was anxious to set him free, but the Jews shouted, 'If you set him free you are no friend of Caesar's; anyone who makes himself King is defying Caesar.' Hearing these words, **Pilate had Jesus brought out and, and seated himself on the chair of judgement at a place called the Pavement,** in Hebrew Gabbatha. It was Passover Preparation Day, about the sixth hour. Pilate said to the Jews, 'Here is your king.' They said 'Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!' Pilate said, 'Do you want me to crucify your king?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king except Caesar.' So in the end Pilate handed him over to be crucified.

Comment:

Some general comments:

1 ***The Jews*** answered, 'We are not allowed to put a man to death.'

We Christians have been guilty over the centuries of blaming and condemning "the Jews" for Jesus' death. Certain Jews and not the Jews as a race were involved in Jesus' passion and death. I am Irish, and conscious that "the Irish" in general were blamed for bombs and destruction in the 1970s, 1980s in the UK. As a catholic ministerial priest, I have been called "paedophile" by a few people.

"Muslims" as a group have suffered for the atrocities committed by the minority.... Read John's Gospel in that light when "the Jews" are mentioned.

I have also included 5 pages of notes on "The Jews" in John's Gospel.

2 ***The trial before Pilate has really been a trial both of Pilate and "the Jews."*** Both have been found wanting and the irony of their failure is that Pilate hands Jesus over to "the Jews" to be crucified, to be lifted up (19:16a).

3 *In John's theology Jesus' death on the cross is a victory. He is lifted up from the earth in victory, he is already on his way to God. This was mentioned earlier in John's gospel: 12:23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.... 27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name..... 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 **And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.**" 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*

John is interested in Pilate as a particular type of person. In Pilate's mind the Jewish authorities had already made up their decision that Jesus should die. This is Jesus' first encounter with the Roman governor. A Roman governor should be impartial. A Roman governor should be able to make a just decision. John uses him as a type of person that he has several times in his Gospel but now brings to the fore. For John the world is almost divided into light and darkness, the good and the bad. Those on Jesus' side and those against him. But there is also a group in his gospel that doesn't want to choose: the parents of the blind man, they don't want to choose to answer the religious authorities. They hedge on whether Jesus has healed their son (See John 9:18-23). People in the synagogue who know Jesus is the Messiah but are afraid to confess it. Pilate is one of these fearful people. The way John presents the trial before Pilate also helps give the image of a Pilate who cannot make a decision easily. In John's Gospel Pilate is in the praetorium. Jesus is also there. The authorities and the crowd are outside. "They did not go into the Praetorium themselves or they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover." (18:28). Pilate has to go outside to talk to the people and inside to talk to Jesus and this dramatizes a man in between. When he goes outside, the crowd is adamant ("we are not allowed put a man to death", and when he goes inside Jesus is just as adamant "Mine is not a kingdom of this world"... "Yes, I am a king. I was born for this..."). Pilate shuttles back and forth trying to make up his mind. John is the one who brings out most clearly why Jesus is brought to Pilate – the Jews have no power to crucify Jesus and so they go to Pilate. For John, Jesus must die on the cross because he is going to be lifted up on the cross. In John's theology Jesus' death on the cross is a victory. He is lifted up from the earth, he is already on his way to God. And the Jews cannot condemn to crucifixion, but Pilate can and will. Why? Because Jesus claims to be a king. This whole question of kingdom is teased out before Pilate. "Are you really a king? "My kingdom is not of this world. If I were my followers would come." **The real issue is that he has come to bear witness to the truth and everyone who is of the truth hears his voice. In other words, is Pilate going to listen to the truth?**

It is not the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate. It is the trial of Pontius Pilate before Jesus, and the suspense is not what is going to happen to Jesus. He is going to be lifted up in victory. The suspense is which way Pilate is going to decide. And we see Pilate trying to make up his mind. Pilate is described as being fearful/ afraid of Jesus. Eventually by going outside the crowd says look the real issue that he claimed to be Son of God. They brought up the kingdom issue and Pilate says that is not an issue and then they bring up the Son of God and that makes Pilate afraid and then he tries to bluff Jesus: "Don't you know I have the authority to put you to death." Jesus answers Pilate: "You have no authority over me except what is given you from above." We realise that Jesus is sovereign before Pilate even as he was before Annas the high priest or before those who come to arrest him. Eventually Pilate goes out to the judgement seat and makes a decision but before he does it, Pilate draws forth from the Jewish crowd and priest the statement: "We have no king but Caesar" and in that sense John says they are denying their hopes of the messiah by seeking Jesus' death. This is a Christian theological judgement that comes from the hostility between church and synagogue. This statement, like Matthew's: "Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Mt 27:25) has been misused over the centuries in hatred against the Jews.

Act 4 – the Crucifixion and burial of Jesus

Two scenes

- 1] The crucifixion and death of Jesus**
- 2] the burial of Jesus**

1] The crucifixion and death of Jesus

Crucifixion and burial

MARK:

15:20b-41 They led him out to crucify him. They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull.

Simon of Cyrene carrying the crossbeam. This was contrary to custom. Normally criminals were made to carry their own cross to the place of crucifixion. It would seem Jesus was already too weakened by the scourging and ill treatment to carry it himself. Simon is identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus, possibly members of the community for whom Mark was writing the gospel.

They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charges against him read: 'The King of the Jews'. And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Mixture of wine and myrrh, designed to have some anaesthetic effect at the extremely painful moment of crucifixion, is refused by Jesus. He will drain to the full the "cup" set before him (14:36; cf. 10:38).

We are simply told: "They crucified him" (24a). Then we are told just three further details: a] the casting of lots for his clothing, a practice common among Roman soldiers. b] the time when he was crucified – about the third hour (9.00 am). Mark begins his careful setting of the time periods that will highlight Jesus' agony. In 15:33 "When it was noon (sixth hour), darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon (ninth hour)." c] The roman practice of placing a sign upon the instrument of execution, indicating the reason for the death sentence is the reason for the inscription, "the King of the Jews." As far as the Roman executioners are concerned, this is a political pretender, executed by the ruling authority for making unacceptable political claims. As far as the reader is concerned, however, Jesus' royalty is being exercised now that he is crucified. Jesus really is the Messiah King whom God intended for Israel.

Two bandits/ robbers were also crucified, one on either side. Jesus had protested at his arrest that his opponents were dealing with him as if he were a bandit (14:38), and now he is crucified among them. The indication of the location of the two, "one on his right and one on his left," repeats the request of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, who sought positions of authority as Jesus and his group journeyed towards Jerusalem (10:37). They believed they were following the one who would restore Israel's royal splendour, but Jesus instructed them that he was only able to offer them a share in his suffering (10:39). Positions on either side of Jesus in Jerusalem are not positions of power, but a sharing in suffering.

The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, 'Aha! So you would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!' The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way. They said 'He saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe.' Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

Passers-by call out insults. “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days!”(v,30). The reader is aware that there is a new temple, constructed upon the foundation of the crucified and risen Christ. The believing reader forms part of that new temple and is aware that everything the passers-by say is true: Jesus is the innocent righteous sufferer, and despite the fact that the Romans have destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, he has constructed a new temple in three days. “Save yourself, and come down from the cross”(v. 31) Jesus will not save himself. An attempt to “save himself” by descending from the cross would, on a principle Jesus had already taught his disciples (8:35: “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it”) run counter to the entire direction of his mission. It is on the cross that Jesus, the innocent righteous sufferer, will build a new temple in three days. The same mistake is made by the Jewish leaders. “The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way. ‘He saved others,’ they said ‘he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe.” (vv. 31b-32) If the one who claims to be the “the Christ, the King of Israel” descends from the cross, then they will see and believe. Jesus whole mission has been to rescue “others” from the grip of Satan; he has come not to be served but to serve, and to give his life. It is precisely through his remaining faithful to that mission that his own salvation and that of others will be assured through the fidelity of the Father. It is by staying on the cross that Jesus establishes himself as Israel’s true king and saviour.

As a final mocking party, even the bandits crucified with him join in the chorus.

[Moloney 317-325; Byrne 240-242; Donahue-Harrington 440-446]

When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' This means 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, 'Listen , he is calling on Elijah .' Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink saying, 'Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down.' But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

Comment:

(below is transcript from notes on Mark: 09 the passion and death of Jesus part 3)

At three o'clock/ the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice in Aramaic with the opening words of Ps 22, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” v.34. Christian reflection has long struggled with the suggestion that Jesus’ final words on the cross could have been such words of dereliction, made even more dramatic by the loud scream as he dies v.37. There have been numerous attempts to overcome this ‘scandal’. Many have argued that Jesus’ citation of the first verse of Ps 22 is an implicit citation of the complete psalm, which includes an expression of confidence and thanksgiving for the saving action of God and the universal proclamation of God’s dominion in the last times (Ps 22 vv.23-32). “The sense of abandonment, and the intensity of the questions that Jesus asks in death, must be maintained to capture fully the Markan presentation of the crucified Christ. It must not be softened or sidestepped in any way. The Gospel has steadily affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God (1:1, 11; 9:7; 14:61b-62). The cry from the cross is final confirmation that only as the crucified saviour, Christ and king of Israel (15:30, 31, 32), Jesus reveals himself to be the Son of God. There can be no easing of that theological agenda, which has been building since Jesus’ first indication that the bridegroom would be taken away (2:20) and the first plotting to destroy Jesus (3:6). Although not explicit in the text, the reader is aware that it is as “Son” that Jesus cries out “my God.” This leads to a further important feature in the logic of the Markan narrative. Jesus’ question leads the reader to wonder: if this is the way God deals with his Son, what

kind of God is this? The answer to that question will not be found in the passion narrative. The mystery of the crucified Christ, king of Israel and Son of God, will be resolved as the centurion makes his confession of faith (15:39), but the question Jesus poses to God in 15:34 (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) leads into the telling of the action of God in 16:1-8. There, although never explicitly mentioned, God is the main protagonist.” [Moloney 326-327]

Moloney mentions the ‘sense of abandonment’ that Jesus felt. Feeling abandoned, yes, but not despair. Donahue-Harrington: “According to Mark 15:34 the last words of Jesus are a quotation of Ps 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” That these words are intended as a cry of despair on Jesus’ part make no sense at all. Why would Mark write a “Gospel” (“good news”) about a tragic figure whose life ends in total despair? Such a work might qualify as a tragedy or a pathetic biography, but hardly as a gospel.

That on the historical level Jesus may have felt abandoned in his final hour – when his closest followers had fled in fear and every powerful group among his own people opposed him – is not impossible. That he even imagined momentarily that his heavenly Father had abandoned him is conceivable. (Raymond) Brown (*Death of the Messiah 1044-51*) develops this point at length: “Jesus is portrayed as profoundly discouraged at the end of his long battle because God, to whose will Jesus committed himself at the beginning of his passion (Mark 14:36; Matt 26:39,42) has not intervened in the struggle and seemingly has left Jesus unsupported” (p.1049). Brown concludes that there is “no persuasive argument against attributing to the Jesus of Mark/ Matt the literal sentiment of feeling forsaken expressed in the psalm quote” (p. 1051).

[Donahue-Harrington pp. 450-451]

In Mark, the report of Jesus’ death is stark. Uttering once again a loud cry – this time wordless – he expires. This scream is Mark’s final and dramatic statement on the crucifixion. Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the king of Israel and Son of God, dies on a cross, being mocked by different groups, falsely accused, let down by his disciples who deny him, leave him, alone, feeling deserted, in agony, with a terrible question on his lips. The gospel brings us here face to face with a mystery before which we can only stand dumb. The Father is letting the Son die plumbing, it would seem, the depths of human alienation from God not because of personal sinfulness but because he bears the weight of all human sinfulness..... Jesus dies and his prayer seemingly unanswered, but read on...the veil of the Temple was torn...

And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, 'In truth this man was a son of God.'

Comment: (God does answer. Jesus replaces the Temple – inner sanctum – God’s presence. Jesus is recognised as God’s Son, but this happens only at his death, and by a Roman centurion.)

Immediately following the death of Jesus, two events take place which indicate the beginning of a new era. As he dies the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom (v. 38), and a Gentile, a Roman centurion, confesses: “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (v. 39). And several curtains have been suggested.

The accusation levelled against Jesus by false witnesses, that he would destroy the temple made by human hands and in three days raise up another, not made by human hands (14:58), repeated in the abuse of the passers-by as Jesus hung upon the cross (15:29) is ironically fulfilled

The Roman centurion: “Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last” (v. 39). The centurion is located in the most advantageous position, standing facing the crucified Jesus. He “sees” the way Jesus dies. What happens with the Roman centurion is the complete reversal of the expectations of the passers-by, who demanded that the crucified Jesus come down from the cross (vv. 39-40) and the Jewish leaders who went so far as to say that they

would “believe” when they saw him come down from the cross (vv. 31-32a). It is the way Jesus breathes his last, crying out to God in loud desperation, and screaming in final agony, that leads the Roman centurion to make his confession: “Truly this man was God’s Son!”. The Gospel has come full circle. It began with an affirmation from God that Jesus was his beloved Son (1:11), and it closes with a confession from a Gentile that this man is the Son of God (15:39). A new temple is built on the destroyed body of Jesus as privileged access to the old temple comes to an end. A Gentile recognises that the Son of God can be found in the crucified Jesus. Whatever a Roman centurion at the cross might have meant in calling Jesus “Son of God,” in the Markan theological context his testimony is an accurate confession of who Jesus really is.

The tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom indicates divine action. Earlier, in the Prologue at the Baptism, Heaven was torn apart (see 1:10). At the cross, as Jesus dies, the divine silence is at last broken. In both baptism and death, the rending signals a divine response to the obedient association of Jesus with sinful humanity: submission to baptism along with repentant mass of Israelites, and being crucified between two criminals in fulfilment of a deeper baptism with which he “had to be baptised” (10:38). In the first instance the rending of the heavens followed by the Father’s assurance “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” In the final instance of rending, there was no accompanying divine voice acknowledging Jesus as “Beloved Son”. In startling paradox, the acknowledgement comes from the opposite direction entirely, from the stained human lips of the centurion who has supervised the crucifixion. In acknowledging the crucified one “In truth the Son of God.” A gentile recognises that God can be found in a crucified Jesus. He becomes the recipient of God’s saving outreach to the nations of the world, among whom Mark’s readers are numbered. The rending of the curtain has negative and positive aspects. It signals the end of the sacrificial system used in the Temple until now, and foreshadows the destruction of the Temple predicted by Jesus in 70 C.E. Jesus’ obedient death on the cross signals the bringing about of a new “house of prayer for all nations” (gentiles). Those who, in the steps of the Roman centurion respond in faith to the preaching of the gospel and participate in the Eucharistic rite instituted by Jesus the night before he died.

The supreme paradox is that Golgotha, the God forsaken place of execution has been rendered through Jesus the locale of God’s saving presence. If God can be present in this way at Golgotha, then there is no corner of the globe so evil, so totally under the control of the demonic as to be immune from the outreach of divine grace. And if the supervisor of Jesus’ execution could have access to that grace, then there is no captivity to evil so great as to render impossible conversion and faith. God’s rule may not yet be finally established on earth, but in his obedience unto death Jesus has dealt the opposing rule of Satan a decisive and ultimately fatal blow “Where sin has abounded, grace has abounded all the more.” (Rom 5:20b)

[Moloney: 325-331-317; Byrne 242-247; Donahue-Harrington 446-452]

There were some women watching from a distance. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome. These used to follow him and look after him when he was in Galilee. And there were many other women there who had come up to Jerusalem with him.

Comment: The women are named. They will notice where the body was laid and be witnesses to the empty tomb

Mark now introduces the women, three of whom he names, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joset, and Salome. Other women are mentioned. He also tells us that the three named women, and the larger group, have been associated with Jesus from his time in Galilee.

This links the women with the earlier teaching and ministry of Jesus. They followed him and ministered (diakonia is the verb in Greek) to him during that time (v. 41b). St Luke, 8:1-4, introduces them earlier in his gospel: "Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources."

At the cross, the women are described as "looking on from a distance," unlike the men who aren't mentioned at all. The reader is made aware of the presence of the women at the cross. They will play an increasingly active role in the last episodes of the story: at the burial (15:47) and at the empty tomb (16:1-8).

2] the burial of Jesus

15:42-47 It was now evening, and since it was Preparation Day (that is, the vigil of the sabbath), there came Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who himself lived in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God, and he boldly went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate, astonished that he should have died so soon, summoned the centurion and enquired if he was already dead. Having been assured of this by the centurion, he granted to corpse to Joseph who bought a shroud, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in the shroud and laid him in a tomb which had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled stone against the entrance to the tomb. Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joset were watching and took note of where he was laid.

Mark's narrative of the burial of Jesus first establishes the time as late Friday afternoon, just before the start of the Sabbath. The law prohibits burial once the time of preparation for a Sabbath begins. Joseph of Arimathea is not mentioned elsewhere in the Gospel of Mark, although he is associated with the burial of Jesus in all of the gospels. He is a law-abiding Jew, whom Mark notes as "a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God." Joseph stands apart from the rest of the Jewish council. The Christian Gospel has preserved and treasured the memory of this courageous and observant Jew who wants to attend to the body of Jesus so that the law not be offended. His request took courage. Mark notes that Joseph boldly asks Pilate for the body for burial before the Sabbath. The general Roman practice was not to grant an honourable burial for those who had been crucified. "If Joseph did not take the initiative it appears that Jesus corpse would have been thrown into a common grave. It would take some courage for a respected member of the Jewish council to approach Pilate directly and request the corpse of one who had shortly before been executed as "King of the Jews.". If the request came from a disciple of Jesus it is very unlikely that Pilate would accede to it. This too indicates that Joseph had not been part of the Jesus' movement and that he was acting out of genuine Jewish piety and not out of some prior knowledge and affiliation with Jesus." (Donahue-Harrington p. 454). Mark portrays Joseph as doing something that the disciples had feared to do. He was willing to associate himself with the crucified Christ. Pilate ascertains from the centurion that Jesus is really dead before releasing the body. The description of a hurried burial follows. There is no washing of the body and no embalming. Jesus' body is taken down from the cross, wrapped in a newly bought linen cloth and laid in a tomb that had been hewn out of a rock. In Jesus' time it was customary to cut out burial caves from the soft limestone rock. The corpse of the newly deceased would be laid out on a kind of shelf and allowed to decompose for a year or so. Then the bones would be gathered and placed in a stone ossuary ("bone

box”) that often bore an inscription with the deceased’s name on top of it. A stone was rolled at the door of the tomb to seal it. This was to prevent tomb robbing. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary take no part in the burial, but continue their watch from afar, observing where the body is laid. (v. 47)

In the midst of rejection and suffering new characters have emerged/ appeared. Outsiders like Simon of Cyrene (15:21); The Pagan Centurion (v. 39); The women (vv. 40,41,47); Joseph of Arimathea (v. 43). They are the first hint of the new generation of disciples following (15:21), showing commitment (40.41.47), belief (39) , courage (43-4) – they have their beginnings at the Cross.

John

19:17-27 They then took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place of the skull or as it was called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him with two others, one on either side with Jesus in the middle. Pilate wrote out a notice and had it fixed to the cross; it read: 'Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.' This notice was read by many of the Jews, because the place that Jesus was crucified was not far from the city, and the writing was in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. So the Jewish chief priests said to Pilate, 'You should not write "King of the Jews", but "This man said: I am King of the Jews".' Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'

When the soldiers had finished crucifying Jesus they took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from neck to hem; so they said to one another, 'Instead of tearing it, let's throw dice to decide which one of us is to have it.' In this way the words of scripture were fulfilled:

They shared out my clothing among them.

They cast lots for my clothes.

This is exactly what the soldiers did.

Near the cross of Jesus his mother stood and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.

Comment: *The aftermath of the Roman Trial, the crucifixion, again for John is very different. He has scenes at the cross that are similar to the other gospels but again he dramatizes. All the gospels mention that there was a type of charge with an inscription of the gospels charge. The King of the Jews. The wording is different in all. It is the only thing written about Jesus in his life time and different in all the gospels. In John it is a very solemn charge. Much more pronounced, in three languages: "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." It is like an imperial proclamation, and that is what the emperors did. They put their proclamations in different languages. This is written in Aramaic, the sacred language of the Jewish people, written in Greek, the language in which the gospel will be proclaimed, and written in Roman (we say Latin) the language of the Roman conqueror. And Pilate confesses it is true: "What I have written, I have written." And John again forces Pilate against his will to confess the truth. Then we have the scene of the dividing of the clothes, and we are told that the soldiers did this in order to fulfil the scripture and it is a very detailed description of the scripture even down to the robe that is not torn. And the soldiers must do this because the scriptures have said so. John goes beyond the other gospels in having people favourable to Jesus at the cross. In the other gospels none of the disciples are present, the women are distant. This is not so in John. The women are present but in particular there are two people who are never named in the gospel: 1] the mother*

of Jesus. If we only had John's gospel we would never know her name. She is mentioned (John 2, Cana, and here – but as the mother of Jesus. And 2] the disciple whom he loved, again never named. Two figures who have a tremendous symbolic role. The issue in the other gospel is often what is the relationship of the family of Jesus, mother, brother, sisters, with Jesus. John combines them, the perfect disciple, the disciples he loved and the mother of Jesus and the perfect disciple becomes her son and she becomes his mother. The family of Jesus is now discipleship. The mother of Jesus is the mother of the beloved disciple. So that Jesus doesn't die alone in John. He dies surrounded by believers, indeed incipient of the beginning church, a community of disciples. The Mother of Jesus and Beloved Disciple are brought together. Real kinship with Jesus is not family or even physical bond between mother and son. The most important kinship is **discipleship**, to share in his ministry and mission. (Blessed is the one who hears the word of God and keeps it). Mary is faithful to the last. The Beloved disciple – the faithful disciple (only mentioned in John) is there too. Jesus dies in John with his family of faith around him. (whoever does the will of God is my family – see Mark 3:35/ Luke 11:27)]

19:27b-30 After this Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the scripture perfectly he said: 'I am thirsty.'

A jar full of vinegar stood there, so putting a sponge soaked in vinegar on a hyssop stick they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the vinegar he said, 'It is accomplished'; and bowing his head he gave up the spirit.

He said that when he was lifted up he would draw all to himself and his lifting up on the cross is a moment of victory. And when it is over, when it is all finished, John's gospel is very specific that Jesus completed everything that the Father gave him to do his last words involve this. Knowing that all had been accomplished he says: "It is accomplished." He had said: I lay down my life, I take it up again, no one takes it from me, now he verifies that. When he has completed his work he gives over his spirit to the faithful community of disciples present. In the other gospels he breathes out his spirit and he dies (into your hands I commit my spirit – Luke; Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last -Mark) but in John's gospel he gives over his spirit to the community of disciples, his mother and the beloved disciple who is now his brother and so he passes on the work of salvation to them. It is a victorious Jesus who dies in John. It is a Jesus who reigns from the cross

Comment. Next section mentions water and blood flowing – life of the community is baptism and eucharist, symbolised here]

2] the burial of Jesus

19:31-42 It was Preparation Day, and to prevent the bodies remaining on the cross during the sabbath - since that sabbath was a day of special solemnity - the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. Consequently, the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first men who had been crucified with him and the other. When they came to Jesus, they found he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it - trustworthy evidence, and he knows he speaks the truth - and he gives it so that you may believe as well.

Because all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture:

Not one bone of his will be broken,

and again, in another place scripture says:

They will look on the one whom they have pierced.

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus - though a secret one because he was afraid of the Jews - asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission, so they came and took the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission, so they came and took it away. Nicodemus came as well - the same one who had first come to Jesus at night time - and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, following the Jewish burial custom. At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in this garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and the tomb was at hand, they laid Jesus there.

In John, even his burial is quite different. Not quick or hasty, but with spices and honoured as a king who has died.

Two characters emerge here. Nicodemus who had earlier come to Jesus at night for fear of "the Jews" (John 3:1) Joseph of Arimathea is introduced as another disciple who had remained hidden for fear of "the Jews." These secret disciples now become public. Joseph of Arimathea asking Pilate for the body and Nicodemus brings a very large quantity of myrrh and aloes. Together they anoint and bind the body of Jesus. Jesus, proclaimed and crowned as a king before Pilate (c.f. John 18:28-19:16a), further proclaimed as a king by the sign on the cross (19:19-22), and who acted as a king from the cross in founding a new people of God (19:25-27), is anointed with an exaggerated large quantity of spices, bound in burial clothes, and placed in a new tomb

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Mark

1. The death of Jesus is the climax of a life spent for others. In the last analysis Jesus dies because of the way he lives and not because of some treachery. In Mark's account Jesus doesn't choose death. He is preparing for the coming rule of God (reign of God/ Kingdom). Human hearts are not prepared to change and Jesus' messianic mission runs into opposition and rejection.
2. Mark's gospel has been described as a passion narrative with a long introduction. This is both correct and incorrect! The ministry of Jesus is not an introduction to the passion. The passion is rather a consequence of the ministry of Jesus. Taking up the cross (Mark 8:34) is equivalent to the entire life-giving mission of Jesus.
3. Jesus' death reveals God's power at work in weakness. In Mark's gospel the true identity of Jesus is acknowledged by a human, outsider and pagan, only at his death. "*Seeing how he die*" (15:39) the Roman Centurion recognizes Jesus as Son of God. Also during Jesus' ministry in the Gospel he is reluctant to say who he is and only in the passion does he seem to accept without hesitation the Messianic title of "Christ" and "Son of the Blessed". Paul had said that the power of God is manifest in "weakness." He speaks of the "wisdom of the cross" which is foolishness for the Gentiles and a scandal for the Jews but an expression of God's power for those who believe. (1Cor 18-31). Paul will boast of his own powerlessness/ weakness so that the power of Christ may shine in him (2Cor 12:7-11), and the same thought runs through "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are ...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." (2Cor 4:7-10)
4. Mark's death scene redefines what a "Christian death" must look like. To die in faith does not necessarily mean all peaceful and pious. Jesus' Mark struggles in death, crying out looking for

an absent God. And yet, the God of Jesus is present even – and especially – in these moments when human dignity seems shredded. No area, no corner of human existence is closed to God’s presence.

5. The way of the disciple must be the way of the cross. Mark does mention their good start but stresses the weaknesses and failures of Jesus’ chosen ones. They are slow to take in his teaching, unable to understand Jesus or his mission and are involved in their own quest for power (chapters 8-10). The passion story tells us of their failure to be alert in prayer, and their leaving and denying him. Authentic discipleship is not just about a good beginning but a long-term process of (continual) conversion.
6. The Church should be a non-triumphant reconciling Church through the experience of the Cross. The disciples in the narrative are not “perfect religious leaders”. We are presented with people who in the face of impending danger of suffering and death flee. Reconciliation does not come from their initiative but from the Risen Christ (He will meet them in Galilee where they began –a new beginning?)
7. Role of outsiders in Mark’s gospel (as opposed to the failures of the insiders) – and what it might mean for our Church.
 - a. Anonymous woman in Bethany who anoints Jesus for his impending passion – this is missed out on by the others (14:3ff)
 - b. Simon of Cyrene, a passer by taking up the Cross (15:21 – Peter had recoiled at the cross see 8:32)
 - c. Joseph of Arimathea a member of the Council coming forward and affirming allegiance to a crucified Christ
 - d. The women standing at a distance – named as they will be witnesses to the resurrection
 - e. The Roman Centurion, pagan executioner, becomes the first person in Mark’s narrative to recognize Jesus as Son of God.
 - f. Disciples absent and unlikely people present is significant. The community of the crucified messiah is open to all: the marginal, the rejected, the converted oppressor, those who search for God...

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