

Reflections for Lent 2021 – Why did Jesus die? 5

Session 5 – Gethsemane and the Trials

Read Mark 14.27 – 15.15: In Mark's gospel the story of the last supper is bookended by Jesus' prophecies of betrayal. It begins with the prophecy of Judas' betrayal and ends with the prophecy that all the disciples will let Jesus down and be scattered. But the risen Christ goes before them into Galilee and waits patiently for them to find the true Way once more, that leads to eternal life.

Mark 14.32–42: The whole story of Gethsemane is a story of human vulnerability. Centre stage is Jesus' own vulnerability. In both Matthew's and Mark's accounts he became grieved and distressed before he began to pray; in Luke his distress grew while he prayed until his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. In each of the Synoptic accounts there can be no doubt of the cost to Jesus in what he was about to do. The disciples' vulnerability is shown in their falling asleep – three times in Matthew and Mark, though only once in Luke. Jesus' agony in Gethsemane is the vital corrective against any assumption that he somehow willed his own death. There is no way that you can read of Jesus' vigil without being clear that Jesus did not wish to die, or to suffer what was about to come.

Mark 14.43–52: It would be usual for Judas to greet his Rabbi with a kiss and would therefore be an obvious way to identify who among the group in the garden was, in fact, the Rabbi and leader of the disciples. The arresting party must have been officially sanctioned to include the slave of the high priest. John identifies him as Malchus, who has his ear sliced for his pains, and identifies the sword-wielder as Simon Peter. But only Luke tells of Jesus healing the slave by touching his ear, demonstrating that even at the time of his greatest crisis, Jesus revealed himself to be the kind of Son of God who never stopped caring for and nurturing those around him when they needed it. And it is Mark alone who tells the story of the young man running away naked from Gethsemane. Some think the story relates to Mark himself – it is the kind of odd detail that only someone there would record. The story does symbolise the panic and fear of the disciples, who turn away from Jesus and run.

Mark 14.55–65: The first trial before the Sanhedrin and the mocking of Jesus. Mark implies that the Sanhedrin (the political and legal Council of Judaism) was called together for an emergency meeting in the High Priest's house. Matthew, Mark and John all suggest that this first trial was held during the night and then Jesus was sent to Pilate first thing in the morning. The accusations levelled against Jesus are that he said he would destroy the temple, and that Jesus considered himself to be the Messiah. Others before Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah, but what led the High Priest to tear his clothes and shout 'blasphemy' was Jesus' declaration 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power', and 'coming with the clouds of heaven'. Sitting on the throne implies that the person described would be acting as ruler and judge. For Jesus to claim this of himself was incendiary.

Mark 14.54, 66–72: The trial of Peter. We are used to calling Peter's denial a denial of Jesus, which of course it was, but it was also a denial of who Peter was too. Peter had spent a lot of time in the presence of Jesus, had followed him with a passion (if not entire understanding) and had committed himself to all that Jesus was. The real tragedy of Peter's denial was that, driven by fear, he turned his back on who he really was. No wonder his tears were tinged with such bitterness.

Mark 15.1–15: The trial before Pilate. This time the accusation is of treason, claiming kingship in a Roman province, which required the Roman death penalty. Pilate does not seem convinced of Jesus' guilt and, to avoid personal responsibility, hands to the crowd the choice of Jesus or Barabbas as the person to be freed that Passover. The crowd had been whipped up and were baying for blood. They called for Barabbas to be freed and for Jesus 'Crucify him!' was their shout. Jesus was silent.

Jesus calls God 'Abba' – what do you think is important about the use of 'Father' in prayer? Is it helpful to you?