



Mark 14:43–52

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. 46

The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. 51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, 52 he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

Reflection

The torchlight is dancing off the olive trees.

Some of them are centuries old, but their ancient boughs watching silently on have never witnessed a scene like this. Peter's fumbling for his sword with all the training of a career fisherman. The Roman soldiers are at ease, scanning the dozen or so men in various states of alertness that they seem to have woken up. No risk here, except for the one staring them down in complete calmness, and with such presence; it's almost as if he has twelve legions of warriors standing at his beck and call, not twelve or so half asleep men who look like they're going to flee at any moment. The authority in his stare makes them clench their weapons tightly, despite their vastly superior numbers. The chief priests and elders (we read in the other gospel accounts) are there. They have smug looks on their faces, they're feigning outrage, as

they try and suppress their smiles. They'd come because they couldn't miss this occasion. After the way this man had humiliated them in the temple courts earlier in the week, they wouldn't miss this for the world. And then, in what must be one of the most surreal scenes in all of the Bible, Judas walks forward and kisses Jesus.

Betrayed by a kiss. What strange scene is this? The tension is palpable. To fight? Or to flee? Only Jesus is calm. All the rest of them, both parties, are filled with adrenalin; senses heighten, hackles rise, time slows down. And then Judas walks the last few steps over to Jesus, and says,

“Rabbi!”

And then kisses him. That's how men greet-

ed each other in Palestine in those days, in fact they still do. But he could have just pointed. Instead,

“Rabbi!”

And he kisses him. To mock him. Not Lord, just Rabbi. Judas has never called him Lord. And everyone can see what he’s come to do. As Judas pulls away from the kiss Jesus looks him in the eye and utters words that penetrate his soul, Luke adds these words to Mark’s accountl,

‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ Luke 22:48

Every word in the Greek is emphatic. There’s nowhere to hide. And I expect for the rest of Judas’ short life these words

would follow him to the grave. Sometimes we try and pretend to ourselves that God somehow cannot see certain sins. We figure if we can keep them secret from others, then perhaps, somehow, God too might be fooled. Judas is not afforded the luxury of similar self-delusion. As he pulls away from the kiss,

‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’

Then the Romans surge forward and to take Jesus.

Why did he do it? Millions have asked that question since. Was it greed? Did he do it for the money? Thirty pieces of silver wasn't that much. But the love of money can be like that, and John tells us that Ju-

das had been skimming out of the communal money bag for some time now. Or was it jealousy? Or disappointment that Jesus wasn't turning out to be the Messiah he'd expected? Had he begun to resent having wasted three years of his life for a lost cause? We can't know for certain. All we can know with certainty is that Judas is guilty of a terrible sin which will follow him eternally. And that he's a warning to all who call themselves Christians and simply go through the motions in their 'Christian' life. As Peter later teaches us, there is no room for complacency in the Christian faith, the devil prowls around looking for Christians to devour, and we must all make every effort to make our calling and election sure (1 Pet 5:8; 2 Pet 1:10).

Why such an armed force? The other gos-

pel accounts describe the leaders as ‘the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders’ leading men armed with swords and clubs. Included amongst them was the temple guard, most likely a contingent of Roman soldiers assigned by Pilate for temple security. They were authorized to carry short-doubled edged swords used for hand-to-hand combat; and they knew how to use them. Those carrying clubs were most likely the temple police and personal security guards of the chief priests and elders, the ones who’d come to an arrangement with Judas. Surely this is overkill when it comes to surprising twelve mostly unarmed men in the middle of the night, with the intention of only arresting one of them? And yet this one had not stopped talking about the kingdom of God since he’d entered Jeru-

saalem, and talk like this during Passover could well mean revolution. Huge crowds had welcomed Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem like the coming of a king and he'd held larger crowds still spellbound in the temple courts by his preaching. Just a word from Jesus would have meant revolution, a popular uprising in a city filled close to six times its usually capacity in anticipation of the Passover festival. Better not to take any chances. Better to take him in the dead of the night in a remote area, to catch them by surprise with a large armed force while they're sleeping.

Only Jesus wasn't sleeping. He was waiting, praying and preparing himself. It may be that he had been watching them come. Gethsemane is on the western side of the Mount of Olives. From there you have a

great view of Jerusalem. It may be that while his disciples were sleeping Jesus saw the torch lights of the approaching party, against the soft glow of Jerusalem, as they made their way out of the city, across the Kidron valley and began to ascend the Mount of Olives.

Judas' treachery was too much for Peter. Mark suppresses his identity but the other three gospel writers don't hold back. Perhaps Peter leaning over Mark's shoulder as he writes is being modest. Swords are drawn, and Peter bravely lashes out at a force many times their number until Jesus commands every single one of them, disciple and Roman soldier alike, to be still. And they are. The High Priest's servant is losing a lot of blood. His ear's been severed. Jesus reaches out and heals him.

And if it hadn't been silent before it was certainly silent in that moment of miraculous healing. So all present could here and be ashamed by Jesus' words spoken into the silence,

48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

He'd humiliated them in temple courts, right in the middle of their home turf earlier in the week. They'd stared murderously back at him but had been completely silenced by his wisdom; to the delight of the huge and growing crowds of religious

pilgrims who'd come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Jesus' words recall their humiliation. And add to it. You can almost see their faces flush, and the anger light up their eyes, as he points out their cowardice.

48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

'Here I am praying in a garden on the Mount of Olives while my huge army of eleven followers are catching up on some sleep. And you've brought a real army, armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Does

this look like a rebellion to you? And it's the dead of the night. Very little that is honourable happens in the dead of the night. There I was sitting every day this week in the temple courts teaching. You didn't arrest me then, in broad daylight. And now here we are, away from the public eye, in the middle of the night, when honest men and women are tucked away in bed; here you are arresting me under the cloak of darkness and in secret. But then again, this is your hour – when darkness reigns.'

Then Mark's sad and curious ending,

50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. 51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, 52 he fled naked, leaving his

garment behind.

Jesus is utterly deserted, his disciples fleeing like cowards, including one particular young man whose garment was seized in a half-hearted attempt at capture by one of the Roman soldiers only for him to flee naked into the darkness. Unique to Mark, some suggest that this young man may have even been the gospel writer himself.

Think

Take a moment now to inwardly digest this scene. That fateful kiss. The intensity of the moment. The prospect of imminent bloodshed. The wash of emotions. Hatred, gloating, mockery, fear, resolve and ... peace. One man, an island amongst all of

this. One man at peace, resting in the will of God. Not imminent bloodshed, only his blood would be shed. Yet he is at peace, resting in the will of God.

Are you at peace? You can experience a peace like this as well. Jesus said in John 16,

‘In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’

We too can have peace amidst a world of trouble. By resting in the will of God like Jesus did in this moment. Jesus has overcome the world. It's just a matter of time. God's kingdom will come and his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven because of what Jesus has done for us.

Pray

Spend a few moments praying over this passage to close our time today. Pray for the grace that you need to give yourself completely over to the will of God for your life so that you can experience the peace that is ours in the Jesus.