

# LENTEN STUDY 4

## 2021

### WESTERN HEIGHTS UNITING CHURCH

#### THE LAST WEEK



I RECOMMEND THAT EACH STUDY IS COMMENCED WITH A TIME OF PRAYER, SPOKEN OR QUIET, ASKING FOR THE SPIRIT OF GOD TO HELP US UNDERSTAND THROUGH OUR DISCUSSION, THINKING, READING.

## Read Mark 14:1-11 Study 4 Wednesday

Take some time to sit with this passage.

To understand the importance of today's passage, we need to take a step back into Mark's Gospel.

Jesus, three times, before the entry to Jerusalem, has told 'the disciples' that he is going to Jerusalem to die.

**The first time** is in Mark 8:31 Peter has said that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus' reply indicates the cost of his opposition to the powers of domination and wealth. These are not God's way. Now look at Peter's response in V32.

Now look at Jesus' response to Peter, and who he includes in that response. (8:33-38.)

Now, the **second time**, Jesus talks to the disciples about his fate in Jerusalem In Mk 9:30-31

Now look at their response in 9:32

Now look at what immediately follows 9:33-37

The **third time** is in 10:32-34

Now look at the disciples' response in 10:35-40

Now look at Jesus' response to his disciples'

#### FOR DISCUSSION

Can you see the patterns in Mark's writing?

What themes are coming through in this for you?

Mark shows how Jesus' disciples fail, time and again to understand, not just about his death, but what his death is about.

In the first encounter, Peter cannot accept that the Messiah is going to suffer because of his mission. In Peter's concept, the Messiah is a victorious conqueror. Note in both 8: 30 and 35, the disciples as a whole are included in Peter's statement. But Peter has got it wrong. His idea is not truth.

In the second encounter, 9;30-37, they cannot comprehend what Jesus is talking about, but the following verses demonstrate where their heads are, so far from Jesus. They are epitomizing the very thing Jesus is contradicting. Greatness and

power are not to be interpreted in the way that Rome, that Caesar (the other son of God so called), interprets and perpetrates it. Jesus is the antithesis of this.

In the third encounter, James and John don't even hear the cross, the suffering, the death. They shift immediately to the glory, and their part in it. Jesus' response, again is about servanthood and suffering as the way of greatness.

Interestingly, for Mark, in all of this, there is no hint of Jesus going and dying for them as some kind of payment for sins. Mark understands Jesus to be calling the disciples to 'take up their cross and follow Him!', to be engaged in cross-shaped living. It is their inability to enter into a Cross-Shaped life that stands between them and Jesus. And yet he persists with them.

Now turn to our passage today.

Remember Mark's method of storytelling, of using a sandwich pattern, where something happens but it is framed, before and after, by another event, and this split even, the body of the story, the middle event, is given poignancy and content by the event that is used to frame it. Remember, Jesus coming into Jerusalem, finding a fig tree with no figs on it because it wasn't the season for figs, then doing his prophetic actions in the temple which he called a den of robbers, and then on the way out, the fig tree is withered to its roots.

Now look at our passage today in that context.

#### **Framing Event Part 1 Mark 14:1-2**

The Chief Priests and the Scribes looking for a way to kill him, in secret, because of their fear of the people.

#### **Event: Mark 14:3-9**

The unnamed woman anointing his body for burial

#### **Framing Event Part 2 Mark 14:10-12**

The disciple Judas, arranges to betray Jesus.

Now, think about what has just been said about the disciples not understanding Jesus' constant references, drawing them back to the cross.

Listen to what Borg and Crossan write.

"She has done what she could," says Jesus. "She has anointed my body for its burial" 14:8.

She alone, of all those who heard Jesus' three prophecies of his death and resurrection, believed him and drew the obvious conclusion. *Since you are*

*going to die and rise, I must anoint you now beforehand, because I will never have a chance to do it afterwards.*

She is, for Mark, the first believer. She is for us, the first Christian. And she believed from the word of Jesus before the discovery of an empty tomb. Jesus has been telling the twelve what leadership entails (to take up your cross and follow me; servant, child, slave) since Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, and has got nowhere. But this unnamed woman has believed him, and Mark recalls Jesus words " Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her. 14:9

It is Judas inability to believe, and to enter into a cross-shaped life with Jesus, that puts him in antithesis to what the woman has done, and shapes him as the betrayer of Christ personified, along with the Chief Priests and Scribes who are in unison with the sort of power Rome portrays, not the sort of power Jesus models.

#### **A PRAYER (Share in whatever way seems best to you as a group)**

Precious perfume poured out  
pervades the evening air,  
overcoming mealy-mouthed self-righteousness  
with breath-taking extravagance.

Precious life laid down  
accosts a broken world  
hammering home the message  
of love beyond belief.

Passionate God,  
we praise you  
for you see beyond the outward act  
to the heart of the giver.

Accept my love-offering, today  
and as I hesitantly offer my all,  
fill me with the fragrance of your spirit  
until I become more like Jesus

In life,  
and in death.