

**“A Dark Thursday”
Mark 14:12-50
March 18, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

**We have arrived at Thursday of Jesus’ final week.
It is a day that is filled to the brim with drama.**

**The day begins when Jesus sends His disciples
to prepare a place to celebrate the Passover meal.**

It will be the final meal that Jesus eats with His disciples.

**After the meal, Jesus and His disciples head out to Gethsemane;
there, Jesus prays for Himself and His disciples.**

**As He predicted, Jesus is betrayed by Judas,
He is then arrested and interrogated.**

**In the midst of all this chaos and drama,
Peter denies knowing Jesus
and the other disciples abandon Him.**

**All of this happens in a very short period of time;
less than 12 hours.**

JESUS’ AWARENESS:

**Jesus had to be aware of the consequences of His teaching.
You just can’t challenge the status quo of authorities
and expect to get away without personal damage.**

**Speaking for God,
Jesus had drawn the attention
of the religious and civil authorities.**

**Jesus was outspoken about their misuse
of their positions and power to their own selfish benefit.
Jesus pointed out their self-serving ways.**

That, quite simply, was not acceptable to those authorities!

**Although the Romans didn't care one way or the other,
Rome was not about to allow the tenuous peace
to be shattered by political unrest, riots
or a radical overthrow of the status quo.**

**All of these things were coming to a flash-point;
Jesus must have been aware of the controversy.**

This situation could only end in the arrest and execution of Jesus.

THE LAST SUPPER:

**As Jesus gathered with his disciples for the Passover meal,
He looked at those gathered with Him
and realized that if His teachings were to survive,
these are the ones who would be the teachers.**

**These are the ones Jesus had chosen – hand-picked –
to receive the good news of the Gospel
and to preach that good news to the world.**

**Jesus had done all He could
to lead these disciples to understand His message.**

**Was it enough?
Had they grasped the truth in what He taught?
Was their faith strong enough
to withstand the opposition they would face?**

The human side of Jesus must have been a little worried.

At that meal,

Jesus did something that has forever changed Christianity.

Jesus looked at his disciples,

**and at what was upon the table at that moment,
and Jesus acted.**

The disciples, being faithful Jews,

would have known the significance of the Passover meal.

**The meal was a reminder that the Jews in slavery to Pharaoh
had been delivered from the Angel of Death**

**by painting their doorposts
with the blood of the Passover lamb.**

Then they were to eat the lamb,

**gird their loins, put on their sandals
and be ready to leave.**

At this meal,

**Jesus took two very common objects: bread and wine
and He used them as visual aids to make His point.**

And Jesus said . . . and I summarize . . .

**This bread will represent my body,
which will soon be broken.**

This wine will represent the blood I will shed.

**As the blood of the Passover lamb spared the Jews from death,
my blood will spare you from eternal death.**

**It is for YOU – and all that believe in me
that I willingly suffer this fate.**

**Not one of those disciples – or us, for that matter –
deserved to be at that table.**

**We are all tenant farmers of this world,
it is not ours; we are but God's stewards of it.**

**And it is not our table,
it is the Lord's table
and the worst sinner who seeks to repent
is welcome to it.**

**It is a VERY powerful message
and it will take us a long time
to begin to understand its significance.**

**GETHSEMANE:
Then the supper was over.**

**The one who would betray Jesus had left early
on his way to alert the religious authorities.**

**It is at Gethsemane
that Jesus predicts they will all become deserters.**

**Jesus knows that their faith is not yet strong enough
to withstand the assault that is coming.**

**When Jesus is struck down –
when they lose their leader
they will all – each of them – scatter.**

**This is not said in condemnation,
Jesus is not scolding them,
Jesus is merely telling them what is about to happen.**

**Peter – the Rock, the stalwart one – declares
that he will never fall away.**

Jesus knows better.

**Human nature is such that when times get too tough,
we leave the battlefield and seek peaceful shelter.**

**The disciples are flawed humans – as are we all -
and their reaction to the arrest and trial of Jesus
is absolutely predictable.**

**Jesus loves them in spite of their humanity!
It is for these – and all those like them –
that Jesus has come to this hour.**

While in the Garden, Jesus prays.

There are some real insights to the nature of God in His prayer.

**First of all, Jesus refers to God with a very intimate term: Abba.
Father.**

**The term suggests an intimacy between them
that comes from many hours spent together.**

**And relying upon that intimacy,
Jesus prays for deliverance.**

Let me pause and ask you . . .

. . . do you feel comfortable asking God for personal things?

The relationship I have with my wife

is built upon 40+ years of intimacy.

**I have no problem asking her for small favors –
- scratch my back, cook my favorite meal,
ask for her advice . . .**

**If we can cultivate an intimate relationship with God –
which happens to be exactly what God wants –
then we feel comfortable asking God for personal favors.**

So, Jesus prays:

**“Father, if it is Your will, take this bitter cup from me.
Nevertheless, may Your will be done.”**

**Now, don’t let this prayer convince you
that it is God’s will for Jesus to die!**

**The religious authorities are responsible for Jesus’ death – not God.
God’s will was for them to repent,
to listen to Jesus and change their ways.**

Instead, they chose to kill Jesus.

**Well, you know the rest of the story.
Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified.**

**During Holy Week, on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday,
we’ll look more closely at this part of the story.**

CONCLUSION:

**If you look at what has happened to Jesus
since He entered Jerusalem and began teaching,
you can clearly see He was faced with many decisions.**

The biggest decision was to enter Jerusalem in the first place.

**Jesus could have shrugged his shoulders
and ignored what was going on in the Temple.**

**Jesus could have chosen not to confront the religious authorities.
Butting heads with these powers
simply could not end well.**

**Jesus could have chosen to soft-pedal His message,
to prolong His life
and have years more of teaching and preaching.**

**Instead, Jesus made the choice to
“steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,”
and never look back or waiver or questions his decision.**

**At this point,
Jesus had taught the disciples all they needed to know
to become the disciples Jesus knew they could be.**

**It was time for Jesus to put His faith into action –
to demonstrate to His disciples the sum of His teaching.**

**There comes a time in the lives of each of us
when it is time to put our faith into action.**

**I can't tell you when that might be –
that is something you and God have to work out together.**

**There comes a time when what we believe
becomes so strong that we must act on that belief.**

Putting my faith into action

is what set my foot on the path to becoming a pastor.

**My faith had been tested,
God said it was time for me to use that faith
and all that I had learned about life
to help others as they test their faith.**

**Lent is an excellent time for us – all of us –
to examine ourselves and test the strength of our faith.
And perhaps to act on what we believe.**

**Whether or not to act . . . what to act upon . . .
. . . well, that is between you and God.**

**It all begins with intimate prayer with God.
Get to know God as well as you can.
Learn to trust God.**

Then . . . take a leap of faith.

PRAYER:

Take us by the hand, God of Mercy and Strength, and lead us into a deeper faith in You. When we have gone as far as our courage will allow, whisper words of encouragement to us and assure us You are with us. Pick us up when we fall, dust us off, and lead us back onto the paths you have set before us. Let us feel Your love and may we respond to You with even greater love for You. This we pray in the name of Jesus, who trod the toughest path of all, Amen.