

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Mark 14:1-15:47

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year B - Palm Sunday, Text: Mark 14:1-15:47 (or 15:1-47)
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(Editor's Note: The comments below are taken from a self-published work by Timothy J. Schaefer, a former Crossways workshop presenter and a student of Dr. Harry Wendt.)

Since the lesson for Maundy Thursday will cover the first part of the Passion Narrative (The Last Supper), we pick up here in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Verses 14:43-53 - Jesus' betrayal and arrest: The crowd is made up of religious leaders bearing swords and clubs, suggesting perhaps that the victory, that will usher in the Messianic Age, is a military one, grasped by force. Judas hypocritically kisses Jesus even as David and Absalom shared a kiss in I Samuel 14 that was followed by Absalom's attempt to gain the throne before David had died. Here one of the disciples also resorts to a sword to defend the arrest. Jesus, perplexed by the use of arms, clarifies that He could have been arrested in the Temple grounds while He was teaching. He assures the crowd that He is not a bandit.

Verses 14:51-52: The disciples all flee and reference is made to one of them fleeing naked, having his linen clothing stripped off. My bet is that it was one of the disciples who was with Jesus while He prayed and was supposed to watch, but instead falls asleep. The Temple grounds at night were guarded by young men clad only in a single linen cloth. If they were caught sleeping, the cloth was ripped off the lad and he was left to run home naked. The custom was meant to keep the young men awake. This is only conjecture, but it does suggest yet another example of Jesus being the new Temple. Jesus is led back to face more religious leaders.

Verses 14:53-54: We should begin by recalling that Peter's relationship with Jesus was begun by Jesus' simple call to "follow Me." It continued in the first passion prediction with these words of Jesus: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Thus far in Jesus

ministry Peter follows, including here, as Jesus is arrested and brought to the courtyard of the high priest. Just how far will Peter follow? Sitting with the guards and warming himself hardly resembles adherence to Jesus' call to deny self. Is this a hint of Peter's future actions?

Verses 14:55-64: These verses contain the Jewish Trial, with the priests and council seeking witnesses that would condemn Jesus to death. They conclude that Jesus' own words are blasphemy, which is, of course, punishable by death. The testimony of false witnesses is paralleled by Jesus' own witness that is true.

First, let us look at the false witness. Nowhere thus far in Mark is there a record of Jesus saying this about the Temple. If we can trust John 2:19, we know that Jesus was referring to Himself as the Temple that will be destroyed. The witnesses here are claiming that Jesus wants to destroy the physical Temple and then rebuild it in 3 days, which, of course, is false.

Jesus knows what He said and what He meant and feels under no constraint to explain Himself any further. In the green center part the high priest asks why Jesus doesn't answer, which in itself, in that culture, would be understood to be an admission of guilt. Jesus makes no response. Jesus is then asked by the high priest, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?" Yet here is Jesus, standing tied and under arrest, in front of the High Priest, who knows full well that this man cannot possibly bring Israel's Messianic Hopes to fruition. His outrage at such a picture results in the rending of his garments, declaring the obvious blasphemy of this man and His delusions. It is settled then. This man must die.

Verse 14:65: It appears that Jesus' condemnation gives those who witnessed it a license to treat Him with contempt.

Verses 14:66-72: Peter still at a distance, but now it is so in a figurative sense. Peter follows Jesus, as it were,

to the cross, but he does not deny himself and follow Jesus. Instead he follows Jesus only to deny Him, not once, not twice, but three times. The often-used literary device of showing emphasis by referring to something three times is again at work here. To his credit he does show remorse. One can only imagine the pain this memory caused Peter as he assists the author of this Gospel in its production.

Verses 15:1-5: This section has two parts. Both deal with the Roman trial and involve not only Pilate but also the chief priests as judge, jury, and executioners. Pilate's question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" is, of course, filled with great irony and is answered in the positive. But the chief priests accuse Him of many other things to which Jesus makes no reply.

Verses 15:6-15: We reach the climax of the two trials. What is most striking here is the play on the name Barabbas, which means "son of the father." The crowd is given a choice as to which Barabbas is to be released, and, of course, they ask for the murderer and not the Son of the heavenly Father. One gets the feeling that Pilate may have really enjoyed referring to Jesus as the King of the Jews as a subtle taunt to the Jewish leaders.

Verses 15:16-20: We see that once again the verdict is followed by inhumane treatment of the condemned. This time it is the Roman soldiers who have their fun. One cannot escape the irony of the soldiers actions in that they treat Jesus as a King. If they only knew.

Verses 15:21-39: The beautiful parallel structure of this section is not obvious when reading these verses from a Bible. As bookends to the account of the cross are two believers.

1) The first is a diaspora Jew from Cyrene (v.21), a Jewish community on the northern coast of Africa in the eastern part of Libya. He is in town, for the Jewish celebration of the Passover. The fact that his two sons are mentioned by name suggests quite strongly that they were known in the early church as believers, making it likely that the father was also a believer.

2) At the end of the section is a Centurian (v.39), who observed the whole crucifixion scene. He also makes a declaration of belief when he states "truly this man was the Son of God" — the same title given to Jesus in the very beginning of the Gospel.

The mention in verse 23 of wine offered to Jesus but declined is paralleled with the giving of vinegar,

which he did take (v. 35). Jesus is crucified and this is paralleled with Jesus breathing His last. Jesus, the new Temple, is unveiled even as the Temple is unveiled when the curtain is torn from top to bottom.

A reference to time and the written word on the cross that Jesus is "The King of the Jews" (v. 25-26) is paralleled by a mention of time in verse 34 (the sixth to the ninth hour). That it was dark from the 6th to the 9th hour has a subtle implication of where God is. Recall that darkness in the Old Testament is one of the symbols for the presence of God. God was seen as dwelling in the Holy of Holies wherein there was no light, window, or lighting fixture. The tearing of the curtain allowed light in and God out. Where is it dark? It is dark down at the cross where Jesus, as God in the flesh, is being crucified.

Earlier in the Gospel James and John request the honor of sitting one at His right and one at His left when Jesus enters into His Kingdom. However, this was not the coronation that they envisioned! (v.27) Turns out that honor was given to two robbers, neither of which is penitent in this Gospel account (v.32).

The only word from the cross in this Gospel account is the opening words of Psalm 22. Most Christians are content to conclude that Jesus feels abandoned by God because the sins of the world are being atoned for. True enough. But compare the whole of Psalm 22.

- Psalm 22:1-5: To be sure, Jesus feels forsaken. Yet in the midst of this feeling the Psalmist confesses that God is holy, praiseworthy and can be trusted to save once again as he so faithfully has done in the past. Jesus feels the same way.

- Psalm 22:6-11: Yet the feeling of rejection and scorn is so real by the accusers. Jesus can identify. Yet the Psalmist repeats his confidence, and so does Jesus.

- Psalm 22:12-21: That animosity felt by the Psalmist is being felt by Jesus from the cross. Yet the Psalmist continues with the confidence that God will deliver. So does Jesus.

- Psalm 22:22-31: The Psalmist believes that God will not only hear but also deliver, and expresses great hope for the future, a future that will benefit people now and those yet unborn. So does Jesus.

Rather than a cry of dereliction, Jesus' words from the cross are an expression of faith in the midst of suffering and trust in the deliverance of God!