

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BREATHLESS

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

The Cup

(Mark 14:112-42)

Study #29

Introduction: Familiarity can breed ???...

The saying goes, “*Familiarity breeds contempt.*” The idea is that, contrary to what we might hope, the more we get to know someone, the more we may tend to dislike them.

In my own experience, familiarity breeds boredom, especially as it relates to stories from the Bible. Every story in the Bible is a story with a bite.

Take the stories of the creation, the fall of mankind into sin, the tower of Babel or the exodus from Egypt. Each one of them is chock full of life-changing truth.

Jesus’ parables are given to transform, as are the stories of Paul and the stories from the Gospels.

However, tell any one of these stories frequently enough and they lose their bite. That can even be true when we come to the most compelling stories around, the narrative that traces the final days of Jesus.

Today, it is quite possible that you have never heard the story before - GREAT! It’ll change your life. But it’s also possible that you have heard the story before us dozens of times.

If so, don’t allow familiarity to breed either contempt or boredom. Listen today to the Word of God as if for the very first time and let the story have its life-changing impact on you.

Last Sunday we saw a woman - Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus - worship Jesus extravagantly. Her action both pictured the extravagance of the gift Jesus would give us when He would die on the cross and invited us to equally extravagant lives of worship and service.

Today, we continue marching in to Jesus’ final week, landing on Thursday, the day before His crucifixion.

Preparing For Passover (vv. 12-16)

The Date of the Last Supper (v. 12a)

[12a] On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed...

It is my understanding that on the Jewish calendar, this day, this Thursday was the 14th of Nissan.¹

In Exodus 12, Moses gave instructions to the Jews of his day to kill the lamb on the 14th day of this month so that the destroying angel of the Lord would “pass over” and not destroy the firstborn in every Jewish home.

Every year following every Jewish family was to commemorate God’s deliverance by sacrificing an unblemished lamb on Nissan 14th, the day of Passover.

¹ There are several different ways to understand the chronology here. 1. Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover, but not on the prescribed date, as Jesus chose to have the feast early, knowing that He was going to be killed on the actual date. 2. Jesus and His disciples were not actually celebrating the Passover (there is no mention of a lamb), but were simply having a meal together on the night before Passover. 3. Jesus and His disciples were celebrating Passover according to the custom of the Galilean Jews, while the Judean Jews observed it on the 15th of Nissan. This (3) is the position that I take.

In the first century, though, there was a discrepancy in calendars and the Galilean Jews (which Jesus and the disciples all were - except for Judas Iscariot) celebrated Passover on Nissan 14, while the Judean Jews celebrated it on Nissan 15.

Thus, we will see Jesus and His disciples making preparations to observe Passover twenty four hours in advance of the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem.

Knowing Jesus' plan to eat the Passover on this Thursday, the disciples came to Jesus with a question.

The Disciples Question to Jesus (v. 12b)

[12b]...His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

And Jesus was quick with an answer.

His answer shows that He had already given the matter some thought. His answer probably means that He had already made plans.

The Passover Prepared (vv. 13-16)

[13] And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; [14] and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' [15] "And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there." [16] The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

It wasn't surprising that Jesus sent two of the disciples from Bethany to Jerusalem on this mission of preparation. He frequently sent workers out "two by two."

It seems likely to me that Jesus had a friend, a contact, in Jerusalem, with whom He had already made arrangements.²

The two disciples would see a man carrying a water jug - an unusual sight since women usually carried the water jars. This man would be on the lookout for them.

This man was wealthy, wealthy enough to have a large upper room in his house, a room large enough for thirteen men to observe the Passover together, and furnished with everything needed for the feast.³

Once they find this man, all the disciples will have to do is prepare the meal. This they did, and after all the preparations were made, which would have taken much of the day, it was time to celebrate the Passover.

Mark tells us, *[17] When it was evening He came with the twelve.*

Since "evening" was a very elastic term, it is possible that, by our clocks, they were all in the upper room ready to observe Passover by 5pm. Or it could have been closer to 9pm. It is hard to say. But at some point as they were eating, Jesus leaned back and made a very disturbing prediction.

Passover in an Upper Room (vv. 18-25)

Coming Apostolic Betrayal (vv. 18-21)

Jesus predicts the betrayal by one of the twelve (v. 18)

[18] As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me - one who is eating with Me."

² If no advance arrangements had been made it would have been impossible to have secured a suitable place for the Passover meal, given the city's overcrowded state at that time of year.

³ Passover was a special meal, and the room provided was more luxurious and formal than would have been customary for the communal meals Jesus and the twelve normally enjoyed.

For some time now Jesus had been making it clear that He would be handed over to the rulers and to the Gentiles to be killed. This is the first hint that the betrayer would be one of them.

Who would have ever dreamed that such treachery could arise from within their ranks?

We can imagine what might have gone through the mind of Judas Iscariot, having already seen him agree to turn Jesus over to the authorities for money. Might he have wondered if Jesus was going to call him out? Did he feel guilty? Was he so angry at Jesus or disappointed in Jesus that he was eager to throw Him under the bus?

But what about Thomas and Bartholomew and James and John and Peter and Andrew? What would THEY have been thinking?

Clearly, they were blindsided by Jesus' revelation!

The apostles are grieved to hear Him say this (v.19)

[19] They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?"

It is easy to picture puzzled looks, hurt feelings, panicked glances around the room, anxious reflective self-doubts bouncing around everywhere.

At this point, eleven out of the twelve apostles had no idea who the betrayer would be. Jesus responded to their question, but did nothing to identify the betrayer.

Jesus identifies the betrayer as one of those who dips with Him in the bowl (v. 20)

[20] And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl."⁴

Well, since they were ALL dipping into the bowl and helping themselves to the food with Jesus, THAT hint wasn't much of a hint.

But it is at least crystal clear that one of the twelve will indeed betray Him.

And, while the rest would have been listening to every word Jesus had to say, we wonder if Judas Iscariot was paying more attention than the others when Jesus spoke again.

Jesus laments the birth of the man who will betray Him (v. 21)

[21] "For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

Yes, the betrayal was a fulfillment of Scriptural prophecy. But it was also an act for which Judas would be completely culpable.

From here, Mark goes on to record the event that occurred at the end of the Passover meal.⁵ It is an event that we imitate on the first Sunday of every month here at Northwest and one that all churches have imitated for the last two thousand years.

Coming Messianic Sacrifice (vv. 22-25)

Bread, which represents His body (v. 22)

[22] While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body."

At Passover, the father normally broke and distributed the bread. Jesus functions here as the host/father of the band.

⁴ This is not a specific accusation as it is portrayed in John's Gospel.

⁵ Mark does not tell us how Jesus' ceremony here fits into the course of the Passover meal.

The bread would have been the unleavened bread of the Passover meal. And according to these words of Jesus, the broken bread symbolized His death.

The bread was not, in fact, His body. But in some sense the bread stood for His body. Just as the bread was broken, so Jesus' body will be broken. He will die. His life will be given up in death.

After distributing the bread, He passed around a communal cup out of which every one of them drank.

Wine, which represents the blood of the covenant (vv. 23-24)

[23] And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. [24] And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."⁶

Just as the bread symbolized Jesus' body, so the cup symbolized Jesus' blood, poured out to establish a new covenant.

Fifteen hundred years earlier, God had rescued His people from Egypt and made a covenant with them at Sinai. Soon, there will be a new covenant for the people of God, one not begun by the slaughter of lambs, but by the soon-to-come death of Jesus.

Jesus made it abundantly clear that His death was indeed soon to come by His next words.

Jesus assures the twelve that He will not drink wine with them again until they drink together in the kingdom of God (v. 25)

[25] "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Jesus' life is coming to an end. (At least is it clear to us; it was far from clear to the twelve...)

⁶ Pouring out the blood is the language of sacrifice and calls to mind such passages as Isaiah 53. We are here thinking about a vicarious death.

And, as Mark tells the story, after instituting the Lord's Supper Jesus moved for a change of scenery.⁷

[26] After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

It is now probably pretty late on Thursday night. Well past dark.

Judas has left the group. It is now Jesus plus the eleven apostles. After leaving Jerusalem, walking through the city gates, down into the Kidron Valley and back up to the Mount of Olives, Jesus spoke to them again.⁸

If what they had heard in the upper room was disturbing, what Jesus says now would have been doubly so.

The Garden of Gethsemane (vv. 26-52)

The Soon-to-Come Falling Away (vv. 26-31)

Jesus predicts the disciples' "falling away" AND that He will lead them to Galilee (vv. 27-28)

[27] And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.' [28] "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

First, they heard that there was a traitor in their midst. Now, each of them is likened to a sheep characterized by a lack of resolve, weak commitment, and a very unmanly cowardice.

What a devastating thing to hear from Jesus!

Of course, His prediction of rising again (resurrection) and then going ahead of them to Galilee speaks of a future after a fall.

⁷ The singing of some or all of Psalms 113-118 was an established part of the Passover meal. There was always lots of singing at Passover.

⁸ This would have still been considered part of "greater Jerusalem." The little village of Bethany where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived was quite a bit farther.

Still, can you imagine how tough it would have been to have heard Jesus tell you that you would fall away, be scattered?

Well, these disciples are not going to take this prediction of apostasy lying down. Especially not Peter!

We don't know if Peter was one of those who had earlier said, ***"Surely it is not me!"*** about the betrayal. But here he asserts his confidence that he was not about to be among the scared and scattered.

Jesus interacts with Peter (vv. 29-31a)

Peter denied that he would ever fall away, even though others might (v. 29)

[29] But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not."

If desertion was unthinkable, denial was even more so.

Throughout the Gospel stories, Peter is the spokesman. He is the spokesman here, too. And here, too, his confidence sets the stage for the story of his personal failure (which we will see next Sunday as we consider the theme of failure in some detail).

Jesus' response to Peter speaks of a very different immediate future.

Jesus assured Peter that he would deny Him three times (v. 30)

[30] And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times."

"Not only will you be among those who fall away, Peter. It will be tonight. And it won't just be a momentary weakness. It will be a repeated performance of apostolic apostasy."

Now, watch what happens next.

You might think that when Jesus - Savior, Master, Lord - offers such a sober warning, Peter might have turned a bit reflective. He might have been humbled.

Nope. Far from being sobered by Jesus' warnings, Peter responded with bluster.

Peter insisted that he would never deny Jesus (v. 31a)

[31a] But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"

And he was joined by the other disciples who likewise refused to believe that they were even capable of such serious misbehavior.

All the disciples were saying what Peter said (v. 31b)

[31b]...And they all were saying the same thing also.

Who knows for how long this backing and forthing went on? Jesus' warnings and predictions were contradicted by the eleven. Could have made for high tension. Might have added pressure to an already pressure-filled night.

In fact, after the predictions of betrayal and desertion, we are ready for violent action. That will come. But it won't come until after the real battle has been fought.

That battle takes place in a serene garden on the Mount of Olives, an olive orchard called Gethsemane, which Jesus and the disciples knew well from previous visits.

The garden story we turn to now is certainly a story of human weakness (just as was the original garden story, Genesis 3). But this garden story is mostly all about Jesus.

This scene is the scene I have been aiming at all morning.

Today, I want us to think our way through this scene, maybe like you never have before. I want us to see Jesus like we've never seen Him before.

This scene of Jesus going to war in the Garden of Gethsemane is recorded in Matthew and Mark and Luke. Not surprisingly, Mark's version is shorter than the other two. But the salient points are all here.

The Battle of Gethsemane (vv. 32-42)

Battle prep (vv. 32-34)

Teammates chosen (vv. 32-33a)

[32] They came to a place named Gethsemane and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." [33a] And He took with Him Peter and James and John

Jesus needed to pray. And He chose to not go and pray all alone.

Jesus was and is the Son of God. But He was also human. And because He was human He hungered for the support of friends.

That is why He took His three closest friends with Him, the inner circle of the apostolic band - Peter, James, and John - leaving the other eight by themselves, to sit and wait until He returned.⁹

As He prepares to commission the three disciples we notice a change in Jesus' demeanor. Mark points it out to us.

Jesus' soul tsunami (vv. 33b-34)

[33b]...and began to be very distressed and troubled. [34] And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch."

He is "very distressed." He is "troubled." He is "deeply grieved."

⁹ Isn't it interesting that Jesus brought along Peter, given His specific prediction of Peter's imminent denial...

Something like shock and awe has overcome Jesus as He is brought face to face with what is before Him. There is about Him a new dread. One commentator said that "*something appears to Him which comes near to 'freezing the blood in His veins.'*" (Kummacher)

As Jesus turned away from the other disciples and made His way to the secluded spot where He was taking Peter, James, and John, He tasted anguish, distress, disorientation, and agitation. Why?

I wonder if it was because at this point He saw more clearly than He ever had what it was that He was facing.

In fact, I have come to believe that there is something in front of Him in the experience of the cross that Jesus had not considered prior to this point.¹⁰

He is surprised. But I don't believe for a moment that He was surprised at facing the cross.

He had known that His life would end on a Roman cross for a very long time.

He had long known that He would be betrayed by a trusted friend, denied by a closer friend, abandoned by all His friends, tried and condemned by His own people, brutally tortured, and then crucified by the Romans.

Not long before this, Jesus was anointed for His death by Mary in Bethany. The chief priests had already determined to put Him to death. Judas had already contracted with them to turn Him over to death. Jesus has told the disciples that the Passover is the last meal He will enjoy with them. He knows that the time is at hand.

None of that would have been a surprise to Jesus. And to think that the mere physicality of the suffering that He was going to face brought about this sudden distress doesn't seem to me to do justice to what we know of the character of the Man.

¹⁰ So Craig Blaising, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 22/4 (December 1979), pp. 333-343. Excellent article.

I think that there was something else beyond this that hit Jesus' soul with the force of a tsunami. And we come to understand what that "something else" was as we listen closely to His prayer.¹¹

Warfare (vv. 35-41)

Round 1 (vv. 35-38)

Jesus prayed (vv. 35-36)

[35] And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. [36] And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."

Clearly, He is extremely exorcised. Distraught. Falling to the ground is not the normal posture for prayer.

And He addressed God, His Father, in the most intimate manner possible. **"Abba"** is an Aramaic term that we roughly understand as equivalent to our English "Daddy" but without a hint of childishness.¹²

He is praying that **"if possible"** (and all things are possible) this "hour" would pass Him by.¹³ The same thought in different words follows, **"Remove this 'cup' from Me."**

Now, is Jesus praying that He will be spared going to the cross?

That is what I thought for years. That is what many people think.

The idea is that now that the cross looms so close, Jesus shrinks in horror from the whole ordeal. But, in the end, He courageously accepts not His own will, but God's will to die the death of crucifixion as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

It is a compelling narrative, but I don't think it squares with the prayer.

If we are going to get at the heart of Jesus here, we have to understand what He had in mind when He spoke of the **"cup."**

There are some places in the Bible where the idea of the "cup" contains the idea of suffering and pain. Much more frequently, though, "cup" envisions the outpouring of the wrath of God.

The prophets often spoke of the cup of God's wrath being poured out on the nations that rebelled against Him. Over in Isaiah 51 we even read of God's wrath being poured out on His own people for their rebellion! (Isaiah 51:17ff.)

But at the conclusion of that passage, the Lord assures His people that having drunk the cup of His wrath, the cup has been taken away from them. His wrath is turned away. They will now enjoy His favor.

Can we see what Jesus is praying?

The cup from which He shrinks is not primarily His own physical suffering. That will be extreme! But He's known that it is coming for a long time.

What rocked Him to the core of His being as He entered into a time of prayer was the realization that He was going to drink of the cup of God's wrath, just as the Jews did hundreds of years before.

His prayer is not at all a request that He will escape the cross. It is a request, by faith, that having drunk the cup, the wrath of God will pass from Him.

I believe that part of what is going on in Gethsemane was a pitched battle between Jesus and the hater of His soul.

¹¹ All of the prayers of Gethsemane from the various Gospels are brief, with only minor variations.

¹² When Paul speaks of our relationship with God in terms of "Abba" (See Romans 8; Galatians 4), he is introducing us to a hitherto unknown and inaccessible intimacy with God.

¹³ On a technical note, this part of His prayer is a first-class conditional construction in Greek. This grammatical form accepts that what follows the "if" is completely viable. The "if" is often translated "since." For an example of this form, see Philippians 2:1ff. Jesus is actually affirming, by faith, that this hour will pass Him by.

The enemy's diabolical temptation was to plant in Jesus' mind the idea that the cup would not pass from Him, that He would be under God's condemning wrath forever.

Jesus battled that temptation with a trusting affirmation that just as the Jews had drunk the cup and God had removed it from them, so this hour of testing, this cup, would pass from Him, too!

There is no confusion between the will of the Father and the will of the Son. It is not as if Jesus doesn't want to die on the cross, but He will if His Father wants Him to.

When He says, "***Yet not what I will, but what You will***" He means that He has not come to do His own will, but the will of His Father. All that matters is what the Father wants.¹⁴

So, Jesus has passed the test. The Garden of Gethsemane was every bit as much a test as the forty days of temptation in the wilderness was a test. And having passed this test by entrusting Himself to His Father, the battle is won.

He will go forward into the most horrible experience of suffering any man has ever known - physically and spiritually - steadfastly trusting God.

And what of the three friends He has brought along for support?

The disciples slept (vv. 37-38)

[37] And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? [38] "Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."¹⁵

¹⁴ This is similar to what Jesus said in John's Gospel, that He had not come to do His own will, but that of His Father. It was not there and it is not here that His will was contrary to that of the Father, but that He was not acting on His own initiative. He was submissive to what the Father wanted.

¹⁵ Fascinating, isn't it? The whole temptation/prayer scene in Gethsemane lasted little more than an hour or so.

In His time in prayer He had drawn great comfort from knowing that suffering was not the end of His story. The cup would be removed after drinking it.

But He would draw no comfort from His friends as He entered His life's most painful chapter.

His first glimpse of His disciples' "helpfulness" came after He had finished His prayer in the Garden and came to retrieve His men from their "watch."

Late night sleepiness is something I totally understand AND they had just had a big meal.

But the same Simon Peter who had just promised Jesus that he would stand for Him unto death, has just succumbed to drowsiness. And we think, Peter, this is not a very promising start.

The cycle repeats.

Round 2 (vv. 39-40)

[39] Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. [40] And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.

Even as He dealt with the personal nightmare that lay before Him and as He steeled Himself for it one last time, even as the bloody sweat poured off His body (see Luke 22:44), the three disciples could not stay alert.

Already, the abandonment that would eventually be final and would include an abandonment even from His own Father, had begun.

Round 3 (v. 41)

[41] And He came the third time, and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting?”¹⁶ It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. [42] “Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!”

And, as He spoke these words, the night sky was lit with soldiers’ torches, and the quiet of the Garden was interrupted with the shouts of a mob armed with swords and clubs making their way to arrest Jesus.

In their great opportunity to be supportive friends to Jesus, the three disciples lost. But in the most severe test of His life, the Battle of Gethsemane, Jesus won. He trusted God and won the victory.

He takes the cup and drinks it to the dregs.

Conclusion:

What we have seen is a prediction of the betrayal of one disciple, the prediction of another disciple’s denial, the prediction of all of the disciples’ scattering, and three sleepy-headed disciples who blew their golden opportunity to offer Jesus support at the moment He could have used it the most.

And we have seen Jesus. He is a towering figure of courage and faith, who never stopped entrusting Himself to His Father, despite the horrible assault He was set to endure against His body and His soul.

We leave today, sobered by the failure of the disciples and reminded to put no confidence in the flesh. But most of all we are reminded to trust Him, the One who trusted and proved Himself the trustworthy One.

¹⁶ Peter, James and John were witnesses to the event. Even though they slept some, were aware enough of what was happening to have told the others and recorded it. Or, if their sleep had been heavy, Jesus told them what happened during His post-resurrection appearances.