

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

Dr. George O. Wood

As we share together from the Word today, I'd like for you to see the Word as bread. Any portion of which you eat will satisfy your soul. Any portion of which if acted upon will transform you, not in part, but in the whole. It's amazing how we can take a part of the Word of God—not the whole of it, but a part of it—break it off and eat it. And it changes, not simply the part of us, but the whole of us.

I personally am convinced that time after time, as we gather around the Word, we must continually heed the admonition of Scripture to not simply be hearers but to be doers, because it's in the taking of what's given that life really ensues.

In the Scripture for today, there's a little incident in verses 51 and 52 which I'm sure you've noticed this week, the young man who follows Jesus into the night who evidently wants to warn Him of the approaching group that will be arresting Him in the Garden of Gethsemane; but on coming to Gethsemane he finds that it is already too late to sound the warning and he himself is nearly caught by the soldiers. He rushes off, fleeing into the night naked. It is as if the Gospel, which is here before us, suggests that he is the actual writer of the entire Gospel. Someone has said that the whole of the Gospel of Mark is a beautiful portrait of the life of Christ. And if you'll look in the dark shadow of the painting, you will find the monogram of the author. Here's his monogram: verses 51 and 52. It is he who in the night, aroused from sleep, has risen to follow Jesus and to warn Him but whose presence now is on the scene too late.

Beautifully and suggestively for us, the writer Mark presents to us—again today—some fascinating portraits of the life of Jesus. You'll see these as portraits. He takes us into four

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

different areas. Four different rooms or places: first, the house of Simon the leper; second, the Upper Room where Jesus breaks bread with the disciples at Passover; third, we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying alone while His disciples are complacent and going to sleep; and fourth, we find a portrait of Mark with Jesus in the house of Caiaphas the high priest. While He is confessing His own identity in the courtyard, Peter is denying that he ever knew the Lord.

What shall we make of these portraits?

I. In the first portrait—Jesus in the house of Simon the leper—we find love that is moving toward Jesus and hate that is moving away from Him.

This is suggestive of what is happening in each of our lives, on this occasion as well as everyday. We are either coming closer into the fellowship of Jesus, or we are moving further out into the night, as Judas. Look first with me at the one who is moving close into the Lord in the fellowship of love.

She is not named in the Gospel of Mark, but by cross-referencing with John 12, we learn her identity. The one who anoints Jesus is none other than Mary, who is the sister of Martha and Lazarus. We have seen her in other parts of the Scripture, before this event. The first time that Scripture speaks to us about Mary, is in Luke 10, where Jesus is teaching and Martha is serving. But Mary is sitting at the feet of the Lord, listening to Him teach, for she counted His fellowship more valuable than activity. This initially suggests to us, of course, that there is that—within the life of Mary—which is intuitive, which is full of feeling, full of emotion, that is contemplative, that has the possibility of being deeply touched in her inner spirit. She knows what it is to really feel something. She wants—more than anything else—her time to be dominated by the teaching of the Lord. There's a time for work but there is a time to sit, to wait and to listen. She drank it in.

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

The second time we see Mary in the Gospels is in John 11. The sisters, Mary and Martha, had sent word to Jesus that their brother Lazarus was ill. It took Him four days to get there and when He arrives, Martha meets Him on the road and says that Lazarus has died. Mary, however, showing that deep-feeling aspect of her character, does not go out to meet Jesus on the road. Rather, she sits in the house and weeps. She was the kind of a person whose emotions, when she had them, really showed. When it was time to be filled with grief, Mary was filled with grief. It was her tears that moved the Lord to tears. Because she wept, He wept. But she knew also how to express her gladness when that time was hers.

And we find that gladness and that expression of love occurring here, as Jesus is in the house of Simon the leper. What an odd place to be. A man, no doubt, that Jesus had healed and who was in the small house fellowship with Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Mary has a problem. She wants to say thanks to the Lord. She wants to show her love, not simply tell it. But she doesn't evidently really know how to go about it. She couldn't treat the Lord as if He were her fiancé. There couldn't have been that greeting and embrace and kiss as would be customary between a man and woman who are in love. She didn't want to give Him something which was just to be carried about because, how long would He be able to carry it? And with His busy activity, could He take a gift that she would bring Him? How could she show her love?

She does something that is characteristic of love. She finds something which apparently, on the surface, appears to be totally impractical. Love does not count the cost of something. If you've ever been in love with someone and have given a ring, you know perhaps what it is to wrestle with this question of love versus practicality. What practical function does a ring have? But every girl in love...you—most of you—either have the ring, or hope you have it. And it's a marvelous expression of love. It is a seal of love. We see that when we're thinking of someone

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

we love, we don't always count what we spend in terms of dollars and cents, and in terms of practicality. Mary was this way. She had a love for the Lord that overflowed. She had something which could have possibly been a family heirloom. It was something very valuable that could have been passed on to her from her mother or even from her grandmother. It was some pure nard in an alabaster jar. Alabaster itself is very costly. It is a consistency slightly softer than marble. It has the quality of being able to look through it dimly. Perfumed jars had a small neck on them which needed to be broken in order to let the perfume flow out. She had kept it there. Mark tells us that the amount of the perfume that was in the jar was worth three hundred denari. A denarius was one day's wage for a workingman. The equivalency of her gift, therefore, is about a one-year salary. Jesus could have fed the five thousand with two hundred denari. Here are three hundred denari...no wonder the disciples sitting there saying, "Why all this waste?" But Mary wants to say thank you to Jesus. She had seen how He had healed. She had seen how He had so freely given and never accepted anything in return and perhaps had refused. Maybe this is why she doesn't ask Him first if she can give the gift. She just gives it. Because all of His life had been the one giving and now she wants to give something in return. How could she ever thank Him for the fantastic miracle which had been accomplished when He had raised her brother, Lazarus, from the dead? So here is an act of thanks. She comes to Jesus, and not only breaks and pours the perfume on His head, but she—according to the Gospel of John—also does so with His feet and wipes His feet with her hair.

Here is an emotional person. And here is a person, by the way, who knows Jesus well enough to know that He won't be bothered by a physical expression of love, by a caress; in fact, by an extravagance of physical love. If there's anything in the Gospel which shows us how approachable Jesus is and how much of a stand-off He was not, it is this. Men, ask yourselves, do

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

I present the kind of a public and private image to persons—particularly persons that are close to me—that would make them want to do something absolutely wild and extravagant in the physical expression of love? Here was Mary, knowing that Jesus wouldn't be bothered by what she was doing at all.

I think this manifestation of the approachableness of Jesus certainly could be backed up with His display of love for us. It's interesting that when Jesus taught the parable of the Prodigal Son, the characteristic of the father was that when the son came home, he saw him from afar, he ran and embraced him. The warmth of the physical expression. Mary, not counting the cost of her gift but wanting to sincerely express it, gave it.

No wonder Jesus says that wherever this story is told, it will be told as a memorial of Mary, because it kind of sets the pattern of what is going to happen...as the men and women who follow Jesus will understand in their life that there is the constant pouring out of life. There have been the deaths of the martyrs. There has been, as well, the giving of life in foreign service. There has been the giving of life in daily routines. There's been the dedication of life to the Lord, which, from the world's point of view, appears to be such a waste. Why do you give your life to the Lord? Why do you care for Him? Why do you give of yourself and of your means to Him? What is purely foolish from a non-Christian's point of view is the essence of the kingdom of God, that love ties and joins us together.

In that beautiful portrait that Mark shows, Mary is loving Jesus. She has learned the value of expressing her love, so that we might express our love to Him all the more and take courage from this to excel in love. While one woman is drawing close to Jesus, and if I were an artist, I would show a painting here of Jesus seated and Mary right next to Him and, way off in the side corner of the painting, down at the bottom, I would show a man with his hand on the door—with

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

the latch unfastened and the door ajar—looking out into the night. And I would portray him in such a way as to show he intended to walk out the door. That’s Judas, heading into the night; night, not only in a physical sense, but also in a spiritual sense. We’ve also seen him before in the Gospels. We saw him in Mark 3 when he was first called with the others to be with Jesus, to have power to heal, to teach, to cast out devils, to raise the dead. He had all that the other disciples had. We saw him once more in John 6 where, after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus recognized the great departure was happening all around him and He said to His disciples, “Will you also go away?” Then He turns to Judas and says, “Did not I choose you twelve and one of you is a devil?” Jesus, of course, had said the same thing to Peter on one occasion, “Satan, get thee behind Me” (Matthew 16:23). So we have a warning sounded to Judas. We see him again in John 12 when Judas is referred to as the person who continually took money from the apostolic purse.

As Mary was growing more and more in love with Jesus, Judas, by his actions, was growing further and further apart from Him and was going out into the night. Mary anoints Jesus’ feet and dries them with her hair, an act of love. But Judas meets Jesus in the garden later and kisses Him, a display of love that is only an empty show. When Judas, by the way, meets Jesus later in the Garden of Gethsemane, he says to those who come with him, “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard” (Mark 14:44, NIV). The word that he uses for “kiss” is the normal word for kiss. But when he actually comes to Jesus in the text of the Gospel, the Greek uses the word for “kiss” which is stronger than the normal word which means “to passionately embrace, to show a deep love, to kiss again.”

How often the signs of love are only a gloss over the treachery that is within the heart. Both Mary and Judas approach Jesus with an act of love, but one was only an empty, clashing cymbal.

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

Judas goes off. Why is it—I ask myself as I have the chance to be a Christian and talk with you and be in this church—that some draw closer to the Lord while others are leaving the Lord?

While some people's hearts are growing warm in worship and devotion and obedience, others, in the same circumstances, in the same meetings, in the same songs, are walking away from the Lord. Maybe it is because of the difference between Mary and Judas. Mary longed to be in the fellowship of love and Judas wanted to be in the fellowship of force. Judas wanted to see the imposition of Jesus' physical kingdom. He didn't like to mess around with this issue called faith where everything isn't always clear. But Mary, because of love, could be in the room of faith. And being with Jesus brought Mary joy but Judas would rather hear the gladness of the chief priests as they responded to his offer of betrayal. He would rather have the warm laughter and applause of the world than the inner company and fellowship of the friends of Jesus and Jesus himself. So he moves away.

This whole setting of Jesus in the house of Simon the leper is somewhat displaced chronologically in the Gospel of Mark; we learn from John that this occasion actually takes place on the Saturday before the triumphal entry. Now Mark has to explain, however, why it is that two days before the feast of the Passover the chief priests change their minds about not arresting Jesus. The reason why they changed their minds is that Judas provides the opportunity. The opportunity is initiated because of something that happened in that room of Simon the leper, where Judas has disdained love, disdained the physical affection of love and walked out to betray the Lord.

II. Next, we see in the portraits which Mark is giving us in the Gospels, Jesus meeting with His disciples for the Feast of the Passover.

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

He has made special provision to get there. For example, He has sent two of His disciples on ahead to prepare to meet a man with a water jar. He would be particularly noticeable because usually only women carried the water jars. The fact that a man would have a jar indicates that he's the plant. So they follow. Jesus didn't want His movements to be evident or known because Judas was seeking to betray Him. So, therefore, He was guarding His movements. Jesus comes to the Upper Room. He says, in the Gospel of John, that He—with great desire—desired the fellowship of that moment with His disciples.

There's some powerful understanding I feel that we can acquire from the significance of the last supper. If we look at the Old Testament understanding of the meaning of the Feast of Passover, during the celebration of the Feast of Passover itself, it's interrupted four times with the drinking of a cup of wine. Once at the beginning, once before the meal, once after the meal and once at the very end. So that, as Jesus sits down to take this supper with the disciples, if He went through—as I'm sure He did—the normal observation of the Passover, there would have been some things which He did along the course of the meal which can help us understand the significance of His work.

In fact, the significance, perhaps, of the four cups of Passover has been theologically traced to Exodus 6:6–7, where the Lord says that He has done some things for Israel. He says in verse 6, “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” Secondly, He says, “I will deliver you from their bondage.” Thirdly, He says, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.” And fourthly, He says, “I will take you for My people. I will be your God. I will bring you into Canaan.” It is thought that each of the times that a cup was drunk in the last Passover feast, the reference could be made to these four occasions: a deliverance, first of all, from burdens; a deliverance from bondage; an act of redemption; and finally a promise. So Jesus would have

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

begun the Passover meal with an invocation, blessing the meal and what it represented, and then, they would have had the first cup. Then the ingredients of the Passover meal would have been brought in—the bitter herbs, which were reminiscent of the hard days of slavery; the stewed fruit, which had the color and consistency of clay, to remind the children of Israel that they had made bricks in Egypt; the greens and the roasted lamb which spoke of their deliverance, which they were to eat all of. And when all of the food had been set, the young son would ask the father, “What do these things mean and what is the significance of this observance and why is this day different from all days?” Of course, Exodus 12 indicates that was to be a pattern. Then the father was to explain the significance of Passover. I’d like to have been in the room that evening as Jesus broke the meaning to His disciples of that great event—Passover.

Then there was a thanksgiving to God for the meal and the drinking of the second cup. When the second cup had been taken, then the bread was broken and the meal began. Jesus says, as He takes the bread, “This is My body which is broken for you,” words that had never been spoken before in the thousand years of Passover up to that time. Jesus now adds the new dimension: His body is to be broken for the disciples. “It’s broken for you.” And He says that one is going to dip the sop with Him and betray Him and, of course, that simply meant taking the bread and dipping it in the stewed fruit mixture and eating it. Judas was sitting close to Him. Judas at that point leaves and Jesus goes on and eats the meal with His disciples. We are required, as Christians, to take all of Him, to apply all of His life to ourselves, so they ate all the Passover.

When the meal was finished, there was a thanksgiving to God for the food which had been eaten. Then there was a third cup, which was to be drunk. The third cup had within it a prayer which called for us to be worthy of the days of the Messiah. A cup that was, in a sense, anticipatory; a cup that signified the redemption that God had wrought. With the taking of that cup at the end of

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

the meal, there was the singing of Psalms 116 through 118. When that singing was accomplished, then there was to be a final cup, which would signify the eternal union of God with His people.

It's fascinating to note that in the supper that is described in all the Gospels, Jesus does not take the final cup. It is after the meal that He takes the cup and says, "Drink of it, all of you." Then they sing a hymn and they go out. They go out into the night. He never evidently lifts the fourth cup to His lips. He instead says, "I will drink that cup new with you in the kingdom of My Father." This is a fantastic way of saying, by symbolism, that the feast of the Passover is still being participated in, that as often as you drink and eat, you do this "in remembrance of Me." That Jesus is giving us Christians, here in the twentieth century, the chance to have the same experience as the disciples and the meal won't be complete until we can all—from every century, from every tribe, from every tongue, from every background who trust in Christ—finish it together, there is coming a day which is described as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb when we will take the final cup of blessing and lift it to the Lord. No wonder Revelation can say, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding of the Lamb."

There is a beautiful picture that was published by Decision magazine a number of years ago, which shows a lavishly set table with the most beautiful china and silverware and goblets. It's in an outdoor setting. Behind it is an expanse, which looks like the edge of the world. And underneath it is the caption, "Behold all things are ready."

Jesus, through this meal is saying to His disciples, what I'm doing for you is associated with the Passover. It's associated with a deliverance. I'm like the lamb that was given that might not be taken. Therefore eat and drink. I'll drink the cup again with you when we all celebrate the finishing of My work in the age to come. Praise God. Praise God!

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

III. Then during the night, the sun long ago having set, Jesus goes out into Gethsemane.

There He prays.

What a picture it is to compare the ministry of Jesus in this moment with His disciples. He is moved and they are complacent. Mark says, He began to be greatly distressed and troubled, which is a way of describing the kind of agony, which hardly knows a fitting word to describe it. Paroxysm might be a word which could be attached to it. It is a grief that is stirring and deep. He communicates this to His disciples and says, “My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Remain here and watch.” But unaware of what was happening to Him and unaware of what would be happening to them that evening they fall asleep, suggestive, of course, of the many times we as disciples have let the Lord down in situations where His heart is broken and He is disturbed and concerned.

We are taught, through this example, to not just leave Him there alone but to come to Him and be with Him and to pray for Him. I know that Jesus said to the disciples, “Stay here and keep watch,” (Mark 14:34, NIV), but I wonder if one of the disciples wouldn’t, at this point, have had the courage to disobey the orders and to come close to Jesus and gather around Him in a circle of prayer and fellowship and say, “Lord, we don’t know what burden You’re carrying. We can’t understand the magnitude of it, but we want to share it with You and we’re here, to be near You,” how that would have consoled Jesus.

That was what Mary had done for Him. When you look at your friends you witness to and the people you’re at work with, and the ministry that God has placed you in, we always ought to see the Lamb of God, broken rather than complacent, concerned and disturbed. That out of the giving of His life salvation might flow.

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

Jesus, on this occasion, is also a contrast with the disciples in that, instead of being motivated by fear, He is motivated by love. The Scripture says, “Perfect love casts out fear.” He loved the disciples. He loves us so much that in that garden, He is the one who remains. All others, Mark is very clear to say, forsook Him and fled. They left. But Jesus, unafraid, remains.

Why is it that they left? I try to ask myself if Mary, the sister of Lazarus, had been in the garden...do you think she would have left? When the soldiers came, do you think she would have gone? I don't think she would have, because I can understand something about a person who expresses themselves that closely in physical love—that she would have drawn near to the heart of Jesus the more the danger approached, so that, if He were to experience danger, she would have experienced it with Him. But in the wisdom of Jesus she was not there, because He alone would experience the pain of that night.

Later, of course, we see in the Book of Acts that the disciples are transformed. No longer is fear displacing love and no longer is fear displacing faith. For they've had the chance to see the finish of the cross. They've had the chance to see the resurrection, so that, when the soldiers come at them again in the Book of Acts, they're steadfast and faithful; which suggests to us, of course, that the basic pattern of Christian life is not failure but victory. But there are times when we have failed. And in the midst of fear, have forgotten love and faith.

IV. Jesus is arrested and comes from there into the house of Caiaphas the high priest, the conniver, an occupant of the high priestly role for some seventeen years.

The counsel is called together. They would have met probably in a horseshoe-like fashion, some seventy members plus the high priest; made up of high priest, Sadducees, elders (probably wealthy landowners and laymen who were also Sadducean) and scribes, who had been basically Pharisaic in conviction and more from the middle class. They gathered around Him to hear the

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

testimonies against Him. But according to the law, the testimonies were not satisfactory, for the witnesses did not agree with one another.

Finally, the high priest, in an act of desperation, in order to pursue the case against the indicted, comes before Him and puts Him under oath and asks Him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61, NIV). Of course, he said, “Son of the Blessed One,” rather than “God” because that was the Hebrew way of getting out of pronouncing the reverent name of God. “Are You the Christ the Son of the Blessed One?” The Lord responds, thereby bringing judgment upon Himself. He had told His disciples in Mark 8, “Whoever denies Me before men I will deny before My Father,” and now, when He is called upon to bear witness to Himself, He does not deny it. He affirms it. All through His ministry, if you’ll notice carefully in Mark, He had avoided flat-out saying to the crowds, “I am the Messiah.” It had been a truth for the disciples, but it had not been revealed to the crowds. Now we know why. Because the moment He expresses that, His ministry is over. The minute you say that in the world today, “There is One who has come who is the way, the truth, the life. All roads don’t lead to God. There is but one perfect way that God has established; the Messiah, the Christ the Son of God,” opposition will arise. The high priest rends His garments, thinking it to be an act of blasphemy, he whose whole life was blasphemous before God rends his own garments.

Peter, down below in the courtyard, is bending under the weight of the occasional. While the Lord is confessing, Simon is denying. So great was his denial, that finally on his third denial he invokes a curse upon himself and upon his listeners if he is not telling the truth.

There is a difference, of course, between the sin of Peter and the sin of Judas, as there is between a person who sins not premeditatively and a person who sins longfully and deliberately. Judas has thought out his sin, it’s been a progression. He has been moving toward that point for a long

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

time. But Peter's sin is sudden. It is not planned. It is impulsive. He goes out and he weeps bitterly. One of the great texts of Scripture is in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul says He appeared to Simon. And that witness is also given in the Gospel of John, "He has appeared to Simon." The Lord restored him because He knew he buckled under pressure. It is not an abiding pattern. The Lord gives us victory, but only when we understand the nature of His Word.

Do you realize that when you understand the ministry of Jesus, when you understand the nature of His life, death, and resurrection, you will never deny Him. You will not fail Him as Peter did. There will be failings, but not the gross kinds of things that are represented here. It is when we don't understand the Lord; it is when we are caught unprepared; it is when we are caught without our time of prayer and without our study of the Word and without our fellowship of the saints; it is when we let life grow lax and cold that the kind of horrible events of denial and fear and failure grip our lives. That's why Jesus had said in the garden, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Mark 14:38, NIV). He didn't want the disciples to fail but, by disobeying Him, they did.

All through this scene, of course, the outstanding feature is the Lord Jesus Christ, who stands forth as the shining example; the One who is not the victim of His circumstances but the victor of His circumstances; the One who, in love and courage, ministers. There ought to be moments in our worship when we, for a few seconds, ask not what the Lord has to say to me, but ask what do I have to say to the Lord? How can I ever thank Him? How can I praise Him enough? How can I rejoice and be glad? That day when Jesus had walked out to Gethsemane, they had sung the Psalm 116–118 and, in the very end of that Psalm, there is the phrase, "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Jesus said that Psalm no doubt on the night that He was to be betrayed. Therefore, when we sing the song, we also ought to sing it with the

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1–72

understanding that, in going to the cross, Jesus was able to give thanks to God. This is His day. I will rejoice and be glad. Let every person who has breath praise the Lord. Let's give thanks.

Closing Prayer

We worship Thee, our loving Father, for You so loved the world and us that You gave Your only Son, that whoever believes, should not perish but have everlasting life. On this day, we thank You for our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus.