

Palm Sunday / The Passion of Our Lord, Gospel, Year B

LITTLE THINGS

Mark 14:1–15:47 (focus on Mark 14:27-42)

Palm Sunday/The Passion of the Our Lord

Analysis by Peter Keyel

27 And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ 28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” 29 Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” 30 Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” 31 But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same. 32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34 And said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” 35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” 37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41 He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?

Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

DIAGNOSIS: We Betray Jesus

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Asleep

Jesus is in distress and grieved. He asks his followers for support. Full of the bread and wine Jesus claimed was his body and blood, the disciples just pledged to die before denying him. Therefore, sitting and watching for an hour while he prays should be no problem, right? Yet, Peter, James, and John all fall asleep. If Jesus had asked one simple thing of us, we would jump right to it. ... Right?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Weak Flesh

In the big picture, especially with Peter’s pending public denials, Judas’ betrayals, and the whole impending death-by-crucifixion, is falling asleep really that big of a deal? It’s not really clear why Jesus asked them to sit and watch, or what they might have seen if they had remained awake. Even after Jesus addresses the issue, and gives them two more chances to get it right, they still just fall asleep. Are the small things they fail in that different from those at which we fail repeatedly? We rationalize that they aren’t really that big of a deal. After all, no one’s perfect.

The little things aren’t the problem. They are just the indicators pointing to a deeper problem. Jesus calls it “weak flesh.” Our weak flesh fundamentally doesn’t want to go out of its way for others, on big or small things. We rationalize and cover for our weak flesh, but the more vigorously we rationalize and justify, the more it is clear we are trying to hide from this truth.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Betrayer at Hand

The disciples continued taking their rest until Jesus' betrayer was at hand. There is no more time for justifications or rationalizations; Jesus is taken off to be tried and executed. The disciples scatter. Peter denies Jesus. The stark truth is that their flesh was too weak to save Jesus or to even stand up to the powers that seek to destroy. Their world has been destroyed with one rapid turn of events.

Are we any different? If we are trying to justify or rationalize our behavior, we are not trusting God to justify our behavior. Invariably, God will expose our weak flesh for all to see, and our rationalizations and justifications will end similarly to the disciples. The destruction of one's world can be hell.

Prognosis: Jesus Saves Us

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Salvation at Hand
After Jesus is dead and buried something miraculous happens: Jesus rises from the dead! The old world has fallen, but something new has come in its place. We see that in Jesus' response to the traitorous and weak disciples—"I will go before you to Galilee" (14:28). This is the start of new world, of a new mercy.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Strong Spirit
Even before Jesus' death and resurrection, we see evidence of this new world beginning. In the midst of the disciples repeatedly falling asleep, Jesus looks past the weak flesh to the spirit kindled within them and loves them. That spirit—their faith created within them—wars with the "weak flesh" and will later burn brighter within them. Instead of worrying about their own justifications and rationalizations, they will trust that they are justified by Jesus. These weak disciples will receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Awake

We know what happens to the disciples after Easter and after Pentecost. They go out to testify to Jesus' death and resurrection. They serve as witnesses to the new world that God is creating in the midst of the old. In many ways, it is done in the small things like spending time with people, helping people in their time of need and seeing Jesus even in the sinners wronging them.