

Crossroad 3—From the Upper Room to Gethsemane

Midweek 3

Mark 14:26-31

"This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24). That is probably not the greeting you were expecting for a Lenten sermon. Easter Sunday—yes. Lenten service—no. It's especially not the greeting you expected when you checked your service folder and saw that tonight we are traveling with Jesus on the crossroad to Gethsemane—that garden where Jesus wrestled with anguish in the cold night, sweating drops of blood. Yet I sing today, "This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." By no means am I trying to make light of or ignore our Savior's suffering by greeting you with a line of praise. Rather, I'm simply starting out this journey from the upper room to Gethsemane the way that Jesus did, with a hymn of praise on his lips.

I. Hear a Hymn of Praise

In our crossroads travels, we have jumped to Thursday, Maundy Thursday, evening. It's been an emotional night. Jesus has washed his disciples' feet, to their amazement. Jesus and his disciples have celebrated the Passover, that heartwarming festival for the Jewish people, recalling the mercy of God and his deliverance of his people from slavery. Jesus has handed a piece of dipped bread to Judas, marking him as his betrayer, and has excused him from the room. Jesus has introduced a new covenant with his disciples by taking the unleavened bread and saying, "This is my body, given for you." And he took the cup of wine, saying, "This is my blood, poured out for you." The evening has been packed full of significant words and actions. And all of this has happened while Jesus knows what awaits him. He knows he's going to Gethsemane to meet his betrayer. He knows that the next morning he'll have his back gouged by Roman whips. He knows that in less than 24 hours, he'll be bleeding at Calvary as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. All this is clearly before his eyes. All this he has attempted to explain to his disciples. While they may not fully grasp what lies ahead, the impending crisis fills the air of the upper room like stagnant smoke. With solemn and perhaps heavy hearts, they clear the table, gather their things, and prepare to journey to Jesus' favorite garden. And how do they conclude? With a hymn of praise!

How wonderful! Our Savior in that mournful hour does not say, "I cannot sing. . . . My heart aches too much. . . . I'm choked up with grief. . . . I'm too sad for praise. . . . Strike up a dirge!" Oh, no! Instead, he leads this chorus of male voices with hymns of praise that resonate off the walls. With a spirit glowing with a holy desire to carry out his Father's will, Jesus belts out genuine songs of adoration. How amazing! How heart-moving for us to hear Jesus begin his journey from the upper room to Gethsemane with a hymn of praise.

Dare we celebrate this holy season of Lent with anything less? I understand the symbolism of carrying out an Alleluia banner a few weeks ago to help us focus on the seriousness of our sin and as a way to augment the joy of bursting forth Alleluias on Easter Sunday. I understand that a black gown may better reflect the somber tone of Lent as opposed to the festive white. And that's fine. That's great. Such symbols can enhance our worship. But for them to do so, let those things serve their purpose. Let them shed light on the beauty of Lent. Let them shed light on the magnitude of Lent. Don't let them rob the joy of Lent. As we travel these crossroads year after year, it becomes so apparent how much our Savior loves us—he so willingly gave himself for us.

Doesn't that make you want to rejoice? Doesn't that make you want to sing, "Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto thee"? May every Lenten sermon we hear, every Lenten hymn we sing, every Lenten prayer we utter, every Lenten offering we bring be filled with praise. Even as we travel this crossroad from the upper room to Gethsemane, we have reason to sing a hymn of praise.

And so, humming hymns of praise, let's descend the steps from the upper room and put ourselves on that road now. The path Jesus and his disciples took was not the most cheery path a traveler could take. Their walk would take them through the Kidron Valley, a deep ravine on the east side of Jerusalem that was dry for most of the year. Some have said that its steep, rocky sides, with their large, black fissures, seem like yawning jaws of an evil monster. The path also served as a burial ground, with white tombstones lining the highway with a shadowy silence. The place was also associated with King David's mournful weeping as he fled from his rebellious son, Absalom, using this path. It seems to provide the perfect eerie backdrop for a suspense thriller movie. Although this path was familiar to the disciples and, therefore, they were probably completely calm when traveling this road, on this evening, this chilling backdrop provided the scenery for some unnerving news that our Savior had to share. With the hymns of praise no longer humming, we now hear Jesus give a prophecy of desertion.

II. Hear a Prophecy of Desertion

Jesus quotes the prophet Zechariah, "*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*" Jesus tells his followers, "Something's going to happen to me, and you guys are all going to leave. You're going to abandon me." How would you react if someone whom you loved and respected told you that? How would you react if your mom or spouse said, "I'm going to be going through some tough times the next couple of months, and I know you won't be there for me"? Wouldn't we be hurt? Offended? We'd insist, "Of course, I'll be there for you. Why do you doubt my love for you?" Well, that's the reaction the disciples had when they heard this prophecy of desertion. Particularly Peter, who replies, "*Even if all fall away, I will not.*" But instead of being assured by this promise of Peter's allegiance, Jesus responds with an even sterner warning for Peter. For the second time that evening, Jesus warns, "*I tell you the truth, today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.*"

Now you would think, since this was the omniscient Jesus talking and since Jesus was quoting Scripture and since this was the second time Jesus warned Peter, Peter would have gotten on his knees and confessed the sin that Jesus said he was going to commit. Or he would have asked for strength not to desert his Savior's side. Instead, we see him putting himself above the wisdom of God, claiming to know himself better than Jesus knew him. Peter emphatically replies, "*Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.*" And it's not only Peter who had the gall to disregard Jesus' prophecy. All the disciples chimed in with their undying devotion.

What can we learn from this conversation on the road? Are we not to apply the same warnings to our lives? The Word boldly warns each and everyone of us, "*If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*" (1 Co 10:12). We are no different than Peter. We love the Lord. We can't imagine leaving him. We love to commune with him. We love to pray to him. We love everything he brings to our lives. We profess at our confirmations that we are willing to die for Jesus' sake. We may even echo Peter, "Others may leave you, Lord, but not

me." We may think things like, "My family has always been active in the church. Certainly, I won't leave." Or I could say, "I'm a pastor. I study your Word for a living. Certainly, I won't leave."

Brothers and sisters, let us not be so arrogant to think we don't need to heed the warnings issued on this crossroad. A great philosopher, Socrates, once said that the greatest quality a person can possess is to know oneself. In response, another wise man said, "Who will introduce me?" God will introduce us to ourselves. We think we know ourselves, but we often neglect to take into account the frailty of our hearts. How many times don't we overestimate our own strength to live for God and fall flat on our faces? How many times don't we underestimate God's warnings and find ourselves denying him with our actions? Through this prophecy of desertion heard on this crossroad, let us be reminded not to rely on ourselves. Let us be reminded not to rely on our faith. Rather, let us be reminded to rely on the object of our faith—Jesus. Let him teach us about ourselves. Let him, through his Word, strengthen us for our spiritual journeys. Let him share with us his will and his way. And it's his way that he also shares with us on this crossroad. For sandwiched in between the two prophecies of a desertion, we hear the promise of a resurrection and a reunion.

III. Hear a Promise of a Resurrection and a Reunion

Did you hear it when I read it earlier? If not, we're no different than the disciples. Based on their quick reaction to defend themselves, it seems that they completely missed the beautiful promise that Jesus extended on this crossroad. Let's not miss it ourselves. After saying the sheep will be scattered, and before Peter's response, Jesus said, "*But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.*"

Cherish this promise of Jesus. He's saying, in theory, that the devil has a good plan. Striking the shepherd does cause the sheep to scatter. We see the devil still using that tactic today. He peppers people in leadership positions with false doctrine, so they in turn lead others astray. It's a successful strategy. But when the devil would strike *the* Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, in this way, his victory would be short lived. For the Shepherd, although he would be struck, would not stay down. He would come roaring back. He would come back to be reunited with his followers. His resurrection would mean a reunion.

And the same holds true today. Because of Christ's resurrection, we will have a reunion with our Savior in all eternity. Because of Christ's resurrection, we will have a reunion with all the saints in glory everlasting. And that truth, that promise of victory so briefly mentioned on this crossroad from the upper room to Gethsemane, puts the hymn of praise back on our lips. A hymn of praise in the middle of Lent. Amen.