

Midweek Lent 4 – Crossroads 4, From Gethsemane to the Sanhedrin  
February 27, 2008

Jesus and his disciples part ways

“Lord Jesus: You are the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.”

Before their family, their spiritual family, and their God they commit themselves to the Lord promising their allegiance even to the point of death. Unfortunately, there are those who part ways with Jesus. It's a disturbing and all too common occurrence among the recently confirmed youth of our synod. WELS statistical data indicates that about 1/3 of our confirmands attend church less than once a month by the time they're 19. Another report says that our synod churches retain about 20% of our young people from the time of their baptism until the age of 30. Disturbing trends. But before we can really start picking on the young the young, as they tend to do, remind us of ourselves. And we too have to admit that yes we have parted ways with Jesus. So let's talk about this disturbing trend. And let's do so by rewinding to the first catechism class some 2000 years ago.

This class spent three years with the greatest teacher. A teacher who gave his students unforgettable lessons as he performed miracle after miracle and even gave them the hands on experience of performing such miracles. A teacher who captivated his students with relevant stories called parables. A teacher who loved them more than anything and called them his family. And after three years the teacher confirms his love for them by sharing with them his very own body and blood. The vows are made, “Surely not I Lord, I will never betray you.” Peter, the class leader says “Even if all fall away I will be with you.” Thomas before arriving in Jerusalem had even said to the others, “Let us also go so that we may die with him.”

That same evening in the garden outside of the city walls Jesus was obviously distraught. “My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death,” he says to his disciples. “Stay with me.” The food and wine of the Passover meal lingered heavily in their stomachs. Even though their teacher was suffering horribly the disciples replaced the time of prayer and support with a short siesta. Already they were not living up to their vows. Their basic needs trumped the desperate needs of their friend and Lord.

With his energy renewed by angels Jesus wakes his disciples for the third and final time. “My betrayer is here,” he says matter-of-factly. Judas walks out of the shadows ahead of the crowd that came to arrest Jesus. “Rabbi,” he says. Judas kisses Jesus. The Greek tells us that this was a prolonged kiss. The same word is used of the woman who had recently anointed Jesus' feet and kissed them. The kiss in that day was a common greeting between friends or even student and teacher. Since it was such a common greeting, it was the perfect sign for those who wished to arrest Jesus. No one would suspect Judas. The crowd seeing the kiss would shortly arrive and make the arrest, it was the perfect cover-up. But Judas should've known better. Jesus saw through the innocent gesture and said, “Judas, you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” Exposed, Judas drops back into the encroaching crowd.

Jesus surveys the scene. A large crowd with torches, clubs, and swords. He recognizes faces that he had seen in the temple when he preached perhaps there were some faces there that were around on Palm Sunday. Peter, the class president steps forward as Jesus is taken into custody. Time to show Jesus that he was a man of his word. Perhaps Jesus' harsh words during the Passover and his sleepiness propelled him to act. Taking a sword Peter courageously strikes a servant clumsily lobbing his ear off. His blow with the sword was countered by the devastating sting of Jesus' sharp rebuke. “Put your sword away!” Jesus says. “Don't you know that I can have twelve legions (72,000) of angels here in an instant?” Peter should've known better. Just prior to this Jesus has asked the crowd who they were looking for. “Jesus,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said, and with those words the entire crowd falls to the ground. Again Jesus asks them who they're looking for. “Jesus,” they replied and again, they fall to the ground. Peter should've known better. Jesus was in control. Then Luke the physician records that Jesus performs the last of his healing miracles and repairs the servant's ear.

When it was obvious that Jesus would be taken away the disciples desert him. All one of them. Running away from Jesus into the darkness. Running away from their courageous vows. As the adrenaline eventually wore off, as they caught their breath perhaps Jesus' teachings came back to mind pricking their consciences. “**Whoever** desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.” **Whoever** does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be

My disciple. As the weight of their actions settled into their minds and hearts the disciples were grieved. We find Peter weeping in the darkness. We find Judas hanging from a rope.

Back in the garden a young man follows as Jesus is taken into custody. He was a young follower of Christ, but not one of the disciples. Most think that this was Mark since he is the only Gospel writer that includes this story. We're also told in the book of Acts that Mark's mother also had a house just outside of Jerusalem. Since he lived close by, Mark wore a night shirt a linen cloth worn by the Jews during the cool summer nights. A hand seizes Mark, fear seizes him even harder. Desperate, Mark fights against the hand and escapes leaving his clothes behind. Nakedness exposed as well as his selfishness and cowardice.

Survey now the crossroads in Gethsemane. Jesus is alone. This is a disturbing crossroads. In dark Gethsemane the darkness of the human soul is revealed. The darkness deepens with the mob. This was not a rag tag group of people. This was a group of priests, ministers, pastors. Church leaders and workers. Stubbornly ignoring the authoritative words and miracles of Jesus. The darkness deepens as we survey the disciples. Friends of Jesus. Faithful followers now put to flight. The darkness deepens even more with Judas, the betrayer.

And here at these crossroads you have Jesus. The only light within a vast sea of darkened dead souls. Jesus had every reason to abandon the darkness, he was the one that should've abandoned his disciples. Thirty pieces of silver Jesus, that's all you're worth. So you're our king Jesus? We come bearing you gifts of swords, chains and torches. Three years with you Jesus and it only takes three minutes to send us running. And what does Jesus do? He heals an ear. He prays for those who abandon him. He calls his betrayer a friend. He asks for forgiveness for those who kill him. And then on the cross under a darkened sky. It's snuffed out, apparently consumed by the deep darkness.

Can the darkness get any deeper? We can shake our heads as we venture into that spiritual darkness on Gethsemane. But the darkness deepens even more when we consider ourselves. Because what sends us running? A crowd with torches and swords, hardly. I'm sure that none of us in here has ever been threatened with death for following Jesus. I'm sure the most persecution any of us has ever experienced has never been beyond the verbal. And yet it's enough to send us flying. Disturbing.

Disturbing crossroads, a crossroads that examines the darkness of our souls and asks is there really something so wrong with me? Is there really something so wrong with the human race? What can we possibly do about it? We grope about in the darkness of our souls, and of course there's nothing. We can't rid the darkness from the human heart any more than we can remove the darkness from the nighttime sky.

But in that hopeless darkness shines a brilliant resurrected light. The light of Christ which is greater than the deepest darkness of the human soul. The light which dispels the darkness like sun-light flooding a darkened room. Those cowards that ran into the darkness, the disciples that parted ways with Jesus continued their cowardly ways hiding in out in cramped upper room. Jesus miraculously enters through the walls of that upper room; but the real miracle was when he broke through the dark walls of the disciple's hearts. And suddenly the deep darkness in their souls was replaced with the light of Christ. And what a change we see in these disciples! As they go from cowards in submission to apostolic heroes on a mission.

And from then on the darkness continued to flee. The apostle Paul, when he was Saul, called himself the chief of sinners. He carried a hateful soul that had been singed black with the fires of hell. Yet, the darkness in that man's heart was not deep enough for Christ. No darkness is. And what a comfort that is for us. As dark as our souls get, as dark as the souls of those around us seem to be, as hopeless and lost as they seem to be, there is hope. Because the light of Christ is greater than the darkness.

And today the light continues to shine into the darkness. Travel into the darkness of your soul. Be amazed by how, hopeless, lost, and dark things were. But don't get lost in it. Use it to see how great Christ's light is. In the upper room, on the road to Emmaus and the shores of Galilee the resurrected Jesus did not revisit dark Gethsemane, the darkness was gone. The dark Gethsemane in your lives, the crossroads where you have parted ways with Jesus, Jesus will not revisit it either, because light has overcome the darkness, light has replaced it. No longer does God see a denying Peter, a hateful Saul, or a hell-bound sinner in you. He sees a saint illumined by the perfect light of Christ.

Disturbing dark crossroads. No more. Jesus walks with us now illumining a path to heaven. And when we look back on this path. In the beginning we see a crossroads. And at that crossroads a cross. A crossroads where Jesus was abandoned one last time, this time by his own Father in heaven. Father and son parted ways at that crossroads so that disturbing deep darkness of the human race would become his, and that brilliantly awesome light of Christ would be ours. Be amazed by the darkness at Gethsemane, but be even more amazed by the light.