

In the Darkest of Nights

Mark 14:41-52

In 1985, Charlie Wedemeyer, the Los Gatos High School football coach who suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig Disease), hovered between life and death. He couldn't even keep down a spoonful of soup, and he was losing weight quickly. "I could feel myself weakening, going," Wedemeyer said. Then a nurse asked him if he wanted to pray. Though not spiritually inclined, Wedemeyer consented. As the nurse placed a hand on him and prayed, he felt a surge of power and peace course through his body. His throat cleared, and for the first time in months, he drank soup without choking. In fact, he drank two bowls in five minutes. His wife, Lucy, said, "It was an absolute miracle. It was as if someone was standing right next to him, saying, 'Just trust in me and everything will be okay.'"

And this: near the bed was an amaryllis plant, a gift from another coach. It had been there for a week, but its flowers remained tightly closed. After the nurse prayed, the flower was in full bloom. "I believe in miracles," Wedemeyer said. "I became a Christian."

For the next twenty-five years, up until Charlie's death in June of 2010, the Wedemeyers toured the world with their powerful message of faith in Christ. Charlie couldn't speak, or even eat or breathe without life support, but he could smile and wink. His radiant presence communicated hope, and Lucy would translate for him. It all started with a prayer, punctuated by the blooming of a flower, a little bit of light in the darkest of nights.

On this night before His death, when the darkness was closing in on Jesus and His disciples, God is still in charge and He still brings hope even in the darkest of nights.

In Gethsemane, just east of Jerusalem, Jesus prayed to the Father, asking that the cup of suffering be taken from him. He nevertheless submitted to the Father's will and rose to meet those who were coming to arrest him. He then spoke to his sleepy disciples, urging them to get up. Listen to the scripture as I read Mark 14:41-52:

41 Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

42 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

43 And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

44 Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely."

45 As soon as He had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

46 Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him.

47 And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

48 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me?

49 I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

50 Then they all forsook Him and fled.

51 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him,

52 and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

1. The Betraying Kiss of a Friend (Mark 14:43-45)

When Jesus shared the Passover meal with His disciples earlier in the evening, He announced that one of His disciples would betray him. Mark had earlier identified the betrayer as Judas Iscariot, who offered his services to the Jewish leaders (Mark 14:10-11, 18). Now, Judas leads a detachment from the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish council, to Jesus in Gethsemane. Judas is "one of the twelve," one of Jesus' closest followers. The traitor, with a well-armed detachment of Jesus' enemies, emerges from the darkness.

What baffles us, of course, is how Judas could betray Jesus. How could a man who been in Jesus' inner circle, who had heard him teach and witnesses his miracles – how could he do it? We know nothing about Judas other than he served as Jesus' treasurer. Judas kept the money bag. John claims that he was a hypocrite who pilfered money from the bag. John reports Jesus as saying, **"Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.** (John 6:70-71). Luke goes so far as to say that Satan entered him (Luke 22:3). Whatever Judas' motivation, at some point he gave in to Satan's influence.

Not only does Judas serve as a guide for the crowd coming to arrest Jesus, he gives orders to the band how to carry out the arrest. He plans how he will assure that they get the right man and not confuse Him with the disciples (the one I will kiss is the man.) A kiss would be a standard greeting for friends, especially for greetings between a rabbi and His disciple. Judas, though, with this act transforms a sign of friendship into a sign of betrayal. For Judas, a kiss was an effective means of fingering Jesus. For Jesus, it must have been a stake in His heart. **"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy"** (Proverbs 27:6).

This gives us our first application: The darkest night reveals those who are not truly in the light.

The deeds Judas committed that night serve as a warning of the dangers of hypocrisy. Judas was as close to Jesus Christ as any man who ever lived. He heard the Gospel from the lips of "the Author and Finisher of our faith". He witnessed love and grace in action every day. He saw the power of God like only a hand full of others has ever seen it. He heard the truth. He saw the truth. He even acknowledged the truth, Matt. 27:4. Yet, Judas died and went to Hell because he failed to believe the truth. Judas literally kissed the gates of Heaven and died and went to Hell.

Don't let that happen to you! Can it? Yes it can! Listen to the words of Jesus Christ Himself. **"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins,"** John 8:24.

Immediately after Jesus felt the lips of His friend, He feels the hands of his enemies: the detachment arrests Him. Then we see,

The Impulsive Act of a Follower (Mark 14:45-47)

One of Jesus' followers, whom Mark doesn't identify, rises to Jesus' defense and strikes out with a sword. John identifies him as Peter, one of Jesus' disciples (John 18:10). See, he came through just as he told Jesus. Of course, not being a trained swordsman, Peter's wild lashing succeeds in cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Again, John tells us that his name is Malchus. Luke lets us know that Jesus actually healed the ear, and Matthew records Jesus' rebuke to Peter. Jesus' quick action and rebuke explains why a brawl did not break out.

Peter had not followed Jesus' instructions in Gethsemane to watch and pray: to stay spiritually alert and to pray. His spirit was willing, but in his flesh he was weak (Mark 14:38).

So our second application today is: When the night is darkest, refuse the temptation to fight.

We will on occasion find ourselves in places that resemble Gethsemane. After all, Jesus led His disciples to Gethsemane. Friends or co-workers or family turn into enemies, betrayers, or backstabbers. Whatever takes place in your Gethsemane, it feels as if the darkness is closing in. At such a time, you may have cause to wonder: Where is God? Didn't he promise to be with you, to never leave you or forsake you, even to hold you by the hand?

In times like this you may want to lash out at someone, perhaps anyone, to satisfy your anger. When you strike with your sword, though, you usually leave behind a bloody mess.

The history of the church is littered with those who far too often have responded like Peter, taking up arms, either literally or figuratively, against its enemies. When the church takes up the weapons of the world, instead of the weapons of the Spirit, it sacrifices its witness. For 200 years, from the end of the eleventh century to the end of the thirteenth century, the church sent Crusaders to the Holy Land. The witness of the church is still reeling, especially in the Middle East. Church historian Bruce Shelley observes,

Unfortunately the popes never held two basic truths which we must never forget: Christianity's highest satisfactions are not guaranteed by possession of special places, and the sword is never God's way to extend Christ's church.

When you find yourself in the darkest night, you may be tempted to fight.

The Lord Who Fulfills the Scriptures (Mark 14:48-49)

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

Jesus, in so many words, says to the detachment that has come to arrest Him, "Isn't this a bit much?" Just as a kiss was a strange way to identify a suspect, swords and clubs are strange implements to bring against someone who has showed no inclination toward violence. It would be one thing if he were an insurrectionist, as many hoped He would be, Jesus is not that kind of Messiah.

Yes, Jesus is a revolutionary, but His revolution is one that conquers the heart with love, not with violence. Jesus said the kingdom of God is the way of the cross, the way of the

Suffering Servant, and the way of self-giving love. He does not fight his enemies nor does He run from them. Strengthened by prayer, He submits to the will of God, His Father.

Jesus still could have gotten away if He chose to do so. We know from John that the crowd literally fell back when Jesus first spoke to them, no doubt because of the authority that emanated from Him. This is not the first time that the guards had tried to arrest Jesus. Another time when He was teaching in the temple courts, the religious leaders had sent them to arrest Him. But they came back empty handed. When asked why, they replied: **“No one ever spoke the way this man does”** (John 7:46). Even now Jesus could have ordered them away.

“But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” With that statement Jesus closes His escape hatch. Jesus must fulfill what was spoken of Him.

Despite their clandestine ways, Jesus’ enemies haven’t taken him by surprise. The guards snuck up on him, but he knew they were coming. He knew the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, that the Son of Man would be betrayed, just as it was written of him (Mark 14:21). Unlike his disciples, Jesus has been watching and praying. His enemies think they own the night, but even the darkest night is under the sovereign hand of God, who is Light (1 John 1:5). Unknownly, they arrested Jesus “to fulfill the Scriptures.”

This shows us that: Even in the darkest night, God is still in charge.

In the darkest night you may be tempted to fight or you may be tempted to despair. Remember, God is still on the throne. You may also face another temptation, one that all the disciples succumbed to. You may be tempted to run.

The Disciples who run (Mark 14:50-51)

Then they all forsook Him and fled. Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

They all lost their nerve. Each would have to speak for himself why he did. Like Peter, they must have been caught off guard by Jesus. The Lord simply gives in to those who came to arrest Him. In fear and disbelief, they all turn and run.

In the darkest night, if you’re not tempted to fight, you’ll probably be tempted to run. When Jesus was seized, not just one disciple but all his disciples ran. We run because we’re scared, because we are spiritually unprepared for the conflict, because, like the disciples that night, sometimes we are sleeping instead of watching and praying.

So: **In the darkest night, beware of your fearing heart that wants to run.**

The church, though it has erred by fighting evil with the weapons of the world, has also erred by retreating from the world. When we withdraw too much from the world, we deprive it of what it needs: the good news of Jesus. The monastic movement of the fourth and fifth centuries, though infinitely more positive in its influence than the Crusades, also failed to further the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

So, we run. Or we fight. Or we do both. Is there another way? Yes. It’s the way of the Lord. In the way of the Lord, you come alive, because Jesus said you will save your life if you lose it for his sake and for the sake of the gospel. In the way of the Lord, you fight, but you fight against spiritual forces of wickedness and you employ weapons of the Spirit: truth, love, and prayer.

All the disciples, who pledged to follow Jesus, abandoned Him. Mark, however, tells us about a young man who was following Jesus after He was arrested. The young man was wearing nothing but a linen sheet. The detachment that seized Jesus also seizes the young man, but he frees himself leaving the linen sheet in the hands of his would-be captors.

Mark alone among the gospel writers includes this curious story. The young man, barely clothed, appears out of nowhere and disappears naked into the night. In the middle of an intense narrative, the story almost comes as comic relief. As we read it we wonder: What's this story doing here?

First, the story emphasizes the isolation of Jesus. All His disciples fled, and someone who wanted to follow Him only shared his fate for a moment before also running away. Where Jesus goes, no one follows.

Still, there might be another reason that Mark includes this story. If we let the story hang in our minds as we read on, we will be reminded of it when we come to the end of the gospel. Further on, Mark reports that Jesus, after He was executed, was wrapped in a "linen cloth" and laid in a tomb (Mark 15:46). When three women came to the tomb, the large stone that covered the tomb, amazingly, had been rolled away. Mark 16:5-6 says: **"And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.'"**

The mysterious "young man" who appeared, out of nowhere, in Gethsemane escaped. Another mysterious "young man" appeared, out of nowhere, in a tomb to announce that the one who had been placed there was, in fact, no longer there. The young man in linen left Gethsemane. Jesus also dressed in linen, left his tomb.

Mark's story of the young man in Gethsemane, in a way foreshadows the resurrection, which will overturn the arrest in Gethsemane, the condemnation of the Sanhedrin, and the verdict of Pilate.

The events of that darkest night still reverberate down the corridors of time. Jesus submits to the Father so that He might **"give His life a ransom for many,"** Mark 10:45.

Our Saviour gave His all in that darkest night so that you might be given life and light.

The darkest night reveals those who are not in the light. Are you? Have you received Jesus into your heart and life? Have you believed the Gospel? Are you saved?

When the night is darkest, you may be tempted to fight. Have you turned you back on the ways of the world and taken up your cross to follow Jesus? Are you willing to suffer with Him?

Remember **Even in the darkest night, God is still in charge.** Will you worship Him and give Him your all because He is God on the throne?

In the darkest night, run to Jesus not from Him. Has He spoken to your heart today? Will you obey Him, or will you leave this place unchanged?