

Sunday April 10, 2022  
Lesson 6: Off Target  
Scripture: Mark 14: 27-42

**Context:**

In today's lesson, we continue in the book of Mark as we begin Holy Week. While other weeks have focused on the ways we can meet the mark of following Jesus, this week we take on a more reflective posture. Today we ponder how we are like the disciples in missing the mark of following Jesus. And today we also celebrate the consistency and forgiving nature of our Lord.

Today is also known as Palm Sunday in the life of the church. On Palm Sunday, we celebrate how Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem fulfilling scriptures from the Old Testament which foretold of this event. There are crowds lining the entrance as they wave palm branches and shout "Hosanna." The disciples play a role in securing the donkey and they prepare the way as people celebrate the King of Kings entering the city.

Soon after this event, things begin to change as Jesus goes from hailed hero to dangerous dissident. At the Passover meal in a secluded room, Jesus foretells his disciples of his impending betrayal, suffering, death, and resurrection. A part of this narrative is how the disciples will abandon him as found in the foretelling of the scriptures. Pulling from the apocalyptic oracles in the book of Zechariah, Jesus quotes his own story with a description of a variety of human actions, behind which stands the action of God.<sup>1</sup>The shepherd will be struck, and the sheep will be scattered.

Jesus makes clear though his death and the sheep scattering will not end the story. He adds of going to Galilee after his resurrection, pointing readers beyond the end of Mark's gospel.<sup>2</sup> However, he must first contend with disciples who emphasize they will not abandon him. Peter insists he will be steadfast and follow Jesus, referencing Peter's earlier eagerness at realizing Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus predicts how Peter will deny him three times before the rooster cries twice.

For Peter, this is nonsense, and he decries such a betrayal. The others agree with him, protesting they will never abandon Jesus. We hear of no response from Jesus and thus the drama continues.

Jesus and the disciples go to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus is to pray. He takes three of the disciples, including Peter, deeper into the garden with him. There as he sits in agony, he continues to find these disciples asleep despite their promise to not fall away. The disciples have missed the point of the word "watch," mirroring a tendency of disciples of all ages to be alert and present to the agony of Christ, in whatever person or situation, in whatever place and time.<sup>3</sup> After three times, Jesus discovers they have not been in prayer and the time has finally come for him to be betrayed. And now the rest of the story will play out and we will discover how Peter will break his second promise and all his disciples will abandon him to his fate.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson Jr., Lamar. "Mark." *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 258.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 260.

## Application

You cannot get to the tomb without first going to Golgotha. I have heard this term and often pondered what it means. Over the years I have come to understand how this term addresses the pain of Jesus on the cross and yet it addresses something else as well. As we come to Holy Week, we remember not only how Jesus gave his life for all, but we also remember all the times we have missed the mark of following Jesus. We cannot come to Easter without reflecting upon the desperate need we have of someone who loves and delivers us despite the constant times we mess up and neglect the call to follow and serve Jesus.

I once had a gentleman profess in a bible study how much he loved Peter because he himself felt like Peter. When I pressed him for why, he said because he felt so much of Peter in his own story. He saw both the passion and eagerness within himself, but he also saw how his actions didn't match his words and how at times he flat out abandoned Jesus if it forced him to make hard decisions or had people not like him. Yet he also saw the hope as Jesus never gave up on Peter.

After this gentleman's testimony, I began to look at people in the bible and the disciples through a different lens. How were my stories like their stories? I look at those like James and John who were in the inner circle of Jesus. Still not satisfied, they wanted to know who was more important and even wanted to know who would sit at the right hand and the left hand of God. Gulp, been there, done that before.

Yet I know it's not just me or the gentlemen. I recently did a Bible study on the disciples where we looked at the original twelve and discovered what we knew from them according to the gospels (and occasionally from Acts.) At the conclusion of every study, we reflected on the question, "Am I like this disciple?" The conversations were always interesting. Sometimes we could completely identify with a disciple and then other times, there wasn't much we felt in terms of connecting to them. Yet by the end of the study, we could all name a different disciple or disciples who we felt drawn to in examining them.

A conclusion we all had about the disciples is they were sometimes proficient at messing up. They didn't always listen to Jesus and sometimes they did their own thing to the detriment of the group and of course missing the call to follow Jesus. All of them had different faults or behaviors which revealed how they missed the mark.

Yet we all realized we were guilty of the same things. How many times have we all said something we later regretted or realized we shouldn't haven't said? Or we go through scripture, thinking our Bible scholar badge has been earned only to realize someone hears something else and we have missed the mark of the Holy Spirit nudging us to a new understanding. We abandon Jesus as we say he is our Lord and Savior, only to make other things a priority in our life so much we give Jesus the leftover whether it is our time or our resources.

The beauty in all of it is how Jesus knows of our fickle nature. Much like he did with Judas and Peter, he still washes our feet and claims to love us to the very end. Time and time again, he foretells of abandonment and yet even still he comes into our lives and reminds us he will not forsake us in the deepest valleys. Jesus shows us consistency and forgiveness in a way we could never understand or demonstrate on our own.

As Christians, we sometimes miss the mark of following Jesus. We focus on ourselves and forget to follow him. Time and time again though, he comes into our lives inviting us to follow him. He does not give up on us and during this Holy Week, we give thanks for the one who loves us despite ourselves.

How do you think you abandon or deny Jesus? Who are the disciples you feel most akin

to in your own journey? Why do you think it is important to reflect on our sinfulness and waywardness during Holy Week? How is Jesus' example of love and forgiveness so counter-cultural to the world we live in today? What is so powerful about Jesus' witness to the disciples in the wake of their betrayal and abandonment?

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