

**Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – Palm Sunday
Lesson Plans for Adults**

Scripture: Mark 14:1-15 or Mark 15:1-39(40-47)

Background

As in Advent, when we went inward to prepare to go outward with Christmas and Epiphany, in Lent we again go inward – in preparation. In the first two Sundays of Lent, Mark, brilliantly succinct, reveals the preparation Jesus experienced. During the next three Sundays John adds shimmering lights on Jesus' ministry before we plunge into the Crucifixion, where we watch, from wherever we are, what Jesus must go through in order to give us Easter. These six vignettes invite us to take a closer look at the choices we are making in our lives and what we might choose to jettison, correct, or add.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Abundance, not scarcity. The costliest of ointments poured out for Jesus. A man carrying a jar of water – work usually reserved for women – shows the way to the Passover meal. Pilate may have had generosity as one of his motives in offering the crowd Jesus' release, but they choose Barabbas; and so Jesus is crucified. The words pierce us across the centuries. A soldier who had stood guard exclaims: "Truly this man was God's Son." This conviction continues to penetrate our souls, creating a space to house the incredible news of Easter.

Theme: Walk with Jesus

Before: You will need to make some decisions about how you want to handle this lesson with your group. Much will depend on whether your class meets before or after the worship service. If it meets before, you may choose to help the group see the whole sweep of the story, focusing on those highlights you have time to discuss. If it meets after, you may wish to concentrate more time on fewer aspects of the reading. Much more is provided than you will probably have time to cover, so make your choices from what is available.

You will need copies of the scripture or a Bible for each person. If a schedule of Holy Week services to be offered at your church is available, make copies so that each member of your class may take one home.

Beginning: If you have copies of the schedule of services for the week to come, give them to members of the class. It helps to point out that only in a perfect world would all of us be able to attend all the services. If you have commuters in your parish, you can also encourage them to find churches near their places of work so they might be able to attend some of the midweek services more easily or simply go into the church for prayer during lunch. We will want to attend those services we are able to attend, be gentle with ourselves about the ones we simply cannot attend, and promise ourselves that during the week we can stop for a moment in awe and in gratitude for God's love poured out in Jesus' sacrifice. It would be useful to come up with when those opportunities might occur (as you wake up in the morning, before bed, while stuck in traffic, instead of watching TV, before signing on to social media, etc.)

Creating the Setting: The Scripture appointed for us for today is two entire chapters of Mark. Since Mark writes in such a succinct manner, he is able to cover a huge amount of territory. We will look at what we can in the time we have together.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, as we conclude our Lenten season, help us not be overcome by regret at what we did not get done and focus more on our growing understanding of your love for us, particularly as we observe this Holy Week to come. Amen.

The Scripture and Questions: We will pick and choose from Mark 14 and 15, according to the time we have. Let's open our Bibles to Mark, Chapter 14. When we select a passage, someone can read it and then we will reflect on it.

Mark 14: 1-9. Interesting the reaction of "some" in verse 4 and 5. How do we balance thinking in terms of scarcity and of abundance as we make decisions?

Mark 14: 10-11. Do you think this squandering of the expensive perfume was the last straw for Judas, or do you think he had already made up his mind? Why? Why not? What does this passage say to you?

Mark 14: 12-16. The Passover feast is at hand. How does Jesus tell his disciples to find the room they are to use? What was unique about the man they were to find? (It would have been unique to find a man hauling water – that was work for women.)

Mark 14: 17-21. Try to identify with the terror each of the eleven disciples must have felt: "Could I be the one who will betray Jesus?"

Mark 14: 22-25. Try to imagine how these words must have sounded to the disciples who did not have the experience we have of coming week after week to the Eucharist. Do we think they were shocked? Comforted? Both?

Mark 14: 26-31. The disciples hear that ALL of them will desert Jesus. Notice Peter's response and the clue Jesus gives Peter.

Mark 14: 32-42. Notice the contrast between Jesus' fervent praying and the disciples exhaustion. Can anyone share an experience of being surprised that sleep came when they would have expected grief to keep them awake?

Mark 14: 43-50. Notice the weaving of violence with non-violence. Judas betrays Jesus not with a sword, but a kiss. The soldiers come with swords and clubs to arrest a completely unarmed man. One man slices off the ear of the high priest's slave, and Jesus heals the slave's ear. Jesus allows the soldiers to arrest him.

Mark 14: 51-52. Who is this "certain young man"? (Some sources say that he might have been a young man who had been sleeping in the house where the disciples had met with Jesus. Others wonder if this man could be John Mark.)

Mark 14: 53-65. What was the responsibility of the Chief Priests? (To maintain the purity of the faith and to protect it from those who would blaspheme it.) Notice their struggle to find testimony to prove the accusations against Jesus. What takes it over the top for them? (Jesus answer in verse 62.)

Mark 14: 66-72. Notice the progression in the three questions put to Peter. Notice also his stunned self-conviction in verse 72.

Mark 15: 1-15. The Chief Priests have handed Jesus over to the Roman authorities. Pilate is the man in charge. At first, it appears that the crowd will help him solve his predicament (verses 6-8). Who does the crowd choose to be spared? (Barabbas.) And what does the crowd want Pilate to do about Jesus? (See verse 14b.)

Mark 15: 16-39. You could ask the members of the class to read this portion silently to themselves and then offer thoughts or words that came to them as they read it. Or you could identify one person to read the passage, and after a few moments, of silence invite people to volunteer thoughts or words that came to them.

Mark 15: 40-47. Notice the mood change in this portion of the scripture. (The gentleness of the description of the women who looked on, and the generosity of Joseph of Arimathea.)

Getting Closure: Ask what insights people have had during this Lenten season. How will these insights play out in their life, both personally and in the church community?

Closing Prayer: You may invite the class to take a few moments of silence and then pray: “The centurion realized the truth we cherish: ‘Truly this man was God’s Son.’ Thank you, God, for love so awesome – poured out for us. Amen.”

Mark 15:1-39, [40-47]

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way

he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

[There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.]

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