

Good Friday 2003
“Jesus’ Passion in Mark and John”
The Rev. Thomas W. Simmons IV

That was a long reading like the one we had Palm Sunday. On Sunday and today we have these long passion narratives of Jesus’ betrayal, trial and crucifixion. On Sunday it was Mark’s passion. Today it’s John’s. Did you notice any differences?

They each present a different perspective on Jesus, a show us a different icon of him. Mark and John each approach the events surrounding the betrayal, passion and resurrection differently. Mark shows us Jesus in his weakness, as a man of sorrows. John shows him in his strength, as the Lord.

Mark focuses heavily on the betrayal of Christ, showing him to be the victim of the perfidy of the chief priests and scribes and Judas who have entered into a conspiracy against him. In the garden Jesus pleads with his father to let this fate pass from him. He is very much alone, as the disciples cannot stay awake with him for prayer. At the moment of betrayal, “they all forsook him and fled,” on of them even ran naked.

From this point on in Mark’s narrative, **Jesus is largely passive**, saying and doing little in the face of his terrible fate. In a series of terse encounters, Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, saying only enough to convict himself when the high priest’s case against him was falling apart.

While on the cross, Mark shows Jesus being mocked by all around. **Jesus is as inarticulate on the cross as he was during his trial**, uttering an agonizing protest to God for forsaking him and then “crying out with a loud voice” before breathing his last. Jesus is portrayed as a passive and silent sacrifice, much in the OT sense of a paschal lamb. He is the suffering servant.

John’s narrative also begins the in the garden of Gethsemane. But where Mark portrays Jesus as being silently led to the slaughter, **John presents a more articulate and combative picture of Christ.** He takes the initiative with his attackers and offers himself to them.

“Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, “whom are you looking for?” Instead of dragging him off as they did in Mark’s passion, in John we see them taken aback, literally bowled over with shock and awe at Jesus.

Jesus then goes to trial, and this is where John really focuses his attention. He tells us all the details and throughout these exchanges shows **Jesus being quite articulate, didactic and even confrontational with his accusers.** He answers questions with questions. “Why do you ask me? Why not ask those who heard what I said to them?” He’s so forthright with the officials that one of the guards

slaps him for being disrespectful. And then he challenges the guard who struck him saying, "Why do you smack me if what I am saying is true?"

And when Jesus is taken to Pilate, he's tough on the Roman governor, too. "Do you ask this on your own or did others tell you about me?" **There are repeated references to Jesus as the King of the Jews.** "He says my kingdom is not of this world."

When Pilate says don't you realize I have power to crucify you or set you free? Jesus says "You have no power over me unless it is given to you from above." That's where Jesus claims to come from and where his kingdom originates.

And then we see Jesus on the cross. Instead of crying out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" as in Mark's narrative, we see Jesus' calm compassion for his mother. **He's taking care of business on the cross** as he makes arrangements for her after his death. Jesus knows "that all things are now accomplished" so he said, "it is finished!" and died. We don't see the dereliction of Messiah on John's cross. He is a confident and triumphant Savior doing his job right, right up to the very end.

John presents a very impressive Christ, in control of the situation at every stage of his passion, fulfilling prophecy, instructing those around him, fulfilling his messianic destiny. He is indeed, in the words of John's prologue, the very "Word of God...who dwelt among us."

The passion narratives of Mark and John present two different pictures of Christ. They both show different but complementary aspects of the character and mystery of Christ. Mark gives us Jesus the man, agonizing over the call God has placed on his life, feeling isolated and abandoned by his friends and by God, helplessly taken from place to place. **He feels, he struggles, he is afraid. I can identify with that.** And thankfully, he can identify with us in our struggles, fear and isolation. He has been here with us in the mud of human existence. He can identify with us in our sorrow, helplessness and weakness. Jesus' death means my death.

John, on the other hand paints an icon of the transcendent deity of Christ, God made man, who "knowing all things that would come upon him went forward" as the triumphant Messiah. As God, he gave his life into his enemies hands, they did not take it from him; and in the resurrection he took it back victoriously. He fulfilled the Scriptures at every step of the way. This narrative enables me to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that in believing [I] may have life in his name" (20.31). Jesus' resurrection means my resurrection. He's strong enough to help us.

In John and Mark we see Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man. We need him to be both. If he is God but not a man, we cannot identify and be one with him. If

he is a man but not God, what good does it do to be able to identify with him for he has nothing more to offer than anyone else?