

Sermon – “No Further Reply”
Friday, April 14, 2017 (Good Friday)
Scripture: Mark 14:32-15:47
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In this place, tonight, we are gathered to hear of the last hours of Jesus Christ before he died. We walk this path with our Lord and with his followers, and it is one of growing darkness without reply.

We will hear tonight the passion of Jesus Christ, the story of his betrayal and arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, death, and burial.¹ It begins immediately after the Last Supper, in a place called Gethsemane. Already in the sadness of what is to come, Jesus, truly God but fully human, prays. “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”² But God’s answer is the hard task ahead of him, and from the Father there is no further reply.

Jesus seeks comfort in his fellowship of disciples, but they cannot, in this hour of peril yet unknown to them, keep awake. He comes to them only to find them sleeping. And again, he returns to them, and he once more discovers them asleep, and they have no reply to this.

His betrayers appear, led by Judas. He states aloud the uncomfortable truth: here in the secrecy of night they have come, as if he could not be found right there in public every day; with clubs and swords they have come, as if he were threatening violence. They cannot answer this; they have no reply.

Arrested there, Jesus is taken before the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. He is silent before them, except for one, powerful, straightforward answer about who he is, after which there is needed no further reply. He is condemned to death, for to those who fear his words, the only solution is one after which they will indeed hear from him no further reply.

His disciples have fled, and hidden, and Peter is spotted. Earlier, he had been told he would deny the Lord three times, and he had argued this point vehemently. But here, called out as a follower of the condemned Jesus, Peter has acted exactly as predicted, denying Christ, and as to the question of his own perfect steadfastness he has no further reply, and he weeps.

When Christ is brought before the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate asks a lot, but Jesus says little, and after saying so little, has no further reply—even to save his life—and Pilate is amazed.

¹ The details of Passion story discussed throughout this sermon come from the Gospel according to Mark. That account of the Passion of Jesus spans from Mark 14:32 to Mark 15:47.

² Mark 14:36 (*New Revised Standard Version*).

Pilate seeks for a while to release Jesus, but the crowd of accusers insists on releasing Barabbas and crucifying Jesus; and Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, eventually makes no further reply.

Jesus is taken out and mocked and derided, but to those who taunt him he makes no reply.

He is crucified, hung on a cross to die, and here is where it grows truly dark, for he cries out to God—“why have you forsaken me”—and we hear from God no reply.³ And our Lord breathes his last, and he perishes there.

From the scriptures and the theology that have been handed down to us, and because we repeat the cycle of remembering and retelling this story year after year, for as long as the sin and death are among us for which this sacrifice was made, we Christians know that this terrible death is a mercy of God. We know that the life and death of Jesus Christ is God’s answer to the dreadful shadow under which we live. We know...for we have whispers of Easter resurrection in our ears already...that in Christ is the full, complete, saving answer, and beyond this our sins and our sorrows need no further reply.

But tonight we are not there yet. Tonight we stand, ourselves disciples, with the disciples who knew Christ personally, in the part of the story where we have heard the promise given, we have seen this promise and all our hopes bound up in Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ is dead; and death appears to have the last word; and there is no further reply.

As we hear this story told us this evening, may God guide our hearing of the Word and direct the meditations of our hearts. We pray, O God, conduct us safely through the darkness that we see unanswered in all our lives, spoken of powerfully here tonight in this Gospel account, until the day we shall see the stone rolled away from the tomb and, meeting our risen Lord face-to-face, we shall need no further reply. Amen.

³ “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is spoken in Mark 15:34. This is actually a quote—it is the opening line of Psalm 22, and likely would have been recognized as such by some of those present. Psalm 22 in its full text is well worth reading thoroughly and pondering in the context of Jesus on the cross. It is a psalm which calls upon God in the midst of terrible sorrow, loss, and lament, and yet nevertheless lands, in the end, upon insistent declaration and proclamation of God’s deliverance.