

Sermon Notes: The Last Week

Lent 2024, Week #4

Introduction

We continue our Lenten sermon series based on the book *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, journeying day by day through Jesus' last week in Jerusalem. This week we move to Wednesday, commonly called "Spy Wednesday" in the Christian liturgical calendar. On this day of Jesus' final week, two of Jesus' followers make important decisions that set the plot in motion for Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. The writer of the Gospel of Mark contrasts for us the decisions made by the woman with the alabaster jar, and Judas, one of the twelve disciples.

Illustration Video(s)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Wgn0KISHl4&t=1s

A clip from the 1999 movie *The Matrix* where Cypher, one of the resistance fighters, agrees to betray his fellow humans and hand them over to the machines.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3H3moON4>

A clip from the 2001 movie *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* where Sam goes to great lengths to honor a promise to Frodo.

Video Discussion Questions

1. In *The Matrix* video, Cypher tell Mr. Anderson, "After nine years, you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss." He decides to betray his fellow humans to live in a world he knows to be false. Why do you think he chooses ignorance over reality? Why did he choose false peace over the lives of his friends?
2. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam is so determined to honor his promise that he makes a seemingly impractical decision to chase Frodo into the river even though Sam cannot swim. Why do you think Sam chose loyalty over safety? What drove him to risk his life for Frodo and Middle Earth?

Mark 14: 1-11 (CEB)

It was two days before Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and legal experts through cunning tricks were searching for a way to arrest Jesus and kill him. But they agreed that it shouldn't happen during the festival; otherwise, there would be an uproar among the people.

Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. During dinner, a woman came in with a vase made of alabaster and containing very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke open the vase and poured the perfume on his head. Some grew angry. They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume? This perfume could have been sold for almost a year's pay and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. You always have the poor with you; and whenever you want, you can do something good for them. But you won't always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body ahead of time for burial. I tell you the truth that, wherever in the whole world the good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her."

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to give Jesus up to them. When they heard it, they were delighted and promised to give him money. So he started looking for an opportunity to turn him in.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. In today's scripture we witness two of Jesus' followers make two very different decisions. One of his followers chooses to betray Jesus for the false peace promised to him by the religious leaders. Another follower made the seemingly impractical decision to anoint Jesus with expensive oil, signaling both his kingship and his impending death. How is Cypher's decision similar to Judas and Sam's decision similar to the woman with the alabaster jar?
2. When have you made a decision similar to Cypher and Judas, betraying a friend or loved one, for false peace? When have you made a decision similar to Sam and the woman, devoting yourself to a person or cause even at great expense to yourself?

Weekly Action

This week, pray and meditate on the question above. Journal about a time you have responded to life as a Judas, and a time you responded as the woman with the alabaster jar. I believe we will find that we have all responded to life as both characters. Consider the circumstances, people, and situations that

led you to make one decision over the other. Go to God in prayer to confess your “Judas moments”, thank God for your “alabaster jar” moments, and pray for strength to walk in love and loyalty from this point forward.

Prayer

Gracious God, your love for us is an invitation into a new way of life. We give you thanks for those who have faithfully followed you and demonstrated the way of Christ’s holy love. Empower us to be those who brightly shine the light of God’s love through our words and silence, our actions, and our stillness. Amen.