THE DEATH of the MESSIAH
Jesus prays and is arrested in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, Across the Kidron
Series Outline

First Sunday in Lent: Introduction

Second Sunday in Lent: Jesus prays and is arrested in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, Across the Kidron

Third Sunday in Lent: Jesus Before the Jewish Authorities

Fourth Sunday in Lent: Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor

Fifth Sunday in Lent: Jesus is crucified and dies on Golgotha. He is buried nearby
References

References

A Crucified Christ in Holy Week. Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives
O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

Collect, Second Sunday in Lent, Book of Common Prayer, p. 218
Introduction
Formation of the Passion Narratives

There may have been one or more oral (and possibly written) pre-Gospel Passion narratives.

Mark wrote his Passion Narrative using only these pre-Gospel narratives.

Matthew wrote his Passion Narrative:
- Drawing heavily from Mark’s narrative, and
- Weaving additional material from “pre-Matthian” traditions known to him.
Luke wrote his Passion Narrative:
- Also drawing heavily – but more freely – from Mark’s narrative, and
- Weaving additional material from oral “pre-Lukan” traditions known to him.

John wrote his Passion Narrative independently from Mark, Matthew and Luke using “pre-Johannine” traditions known only to him.
- He also had access to some of the same “pre-Lucan” traditions Luke used.
Introduction
Passion Narratives as Drama


The first Act of the Passion Narrative describes how Jesus, having left the Last Supper with his disciples, went across the Kidron to a place (Gethsemane) on the Mount of Olives and prayed there to his Father while his disciples slept, Judas arrived with an armed party; and, during an incident where the ear of the servant of the high priest was cut off, Jesus was arrested.

Scene 1: Jesus Goes To The Site And Prays There (Mark 14:26-42; Matt 26:30-46; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1)

Introduction
Passion Narratives as Drama


Introduction
Where Would We Have Stood?

Where would we have stood as part of the Passion narratives?

- With the disciples who fled from danger, abandoning Jesus?
- With Peter, denying Jesus?
- With Judas, betraying Jesus?
- With the Pilate of John, trying to avoid a decision between good and evil?
- With the Pilate of Matthew, washing our hands of a bad decision so to appear blameless?
- With the religious leaders (many sincerely religious) who condemned Jesus?
Introduction
Different Facets of Jesus

Each of the Gospel writers had a distinctive outlook on the Passion. Each knows a different facet of Jesus:

- The Jesus in Mark and Matthew plumbs the depths of abandonment only to be vindicated.
- The Jesus in Luke worries about others and gently dispenses forgiveness.
- The Jesus in John reigns victoriously from the cross in control of all that happens.

No one of these perspectives exhausts the meaning of Jesus. It is as if one walks around a large diamond to look at it from three different angles.
Jesus prays and is then arrested in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Across the Kidron
Mark's Passion Narrative
Jesus had come to terms with necessity that he must suffer and die before the Kingdom of God can come. However, his disciples had not accepted this. Jesus tells them: “You will all become deserters” (NRSV 14:27).

Peter claims: “I will not” (NRSV 14:20).
The darkness and gloom of this beginning only intensifies until Jesus dies.

He will have no support from his followers; he will die alone.

He separates himself from the larger body of the disciples; then further separates himself from Peter, James and John.

He confesses in prayer: “I am deeply grieved, even to death.” (NRSV 14:34).  °
Mark

The Jesus who had preached “Whoever would save his life will lose it” now prays, more poignantly than any other Gospel: “Abba, Father . . . remove this cup from me . . .” (NRSV 14:36).

There is no apparent response from God.

Jesus finally arises, resolved to meet his betrayer.
Jesus’ resignation to his fate is seen in his lack of response (in contrast to the other 3 gospels) to:

- Judas’ kiss,
- A bystander cutting off the ear of the slave of the High Priest.

“. . . Let the scriptures be fulfilled.” (14:49).

Seeing Jesus’ resignation, “All of them [his disciples] deserted and fled.” (14:50).
Totality of Jesus’ abandonment illustrated in unique story in Mark of a young disciple who seeks to follow:

When seized like Jesus, this disciple escapes by slipping out of his clothes and running off naked.

First disciples left work and family (1:18, 20), everything (10:28) for Jesus; this last disciple leaves everything to get away.
Challenges posed by Mark’s portrayal of Jesus in Gethsemane:

- How could a Jesus who so feared to die be divine?
- How could a Jesus so devoted to God pray to avoid the cross he had proclaimed necessary for others?
- Contrast Jesus’ anguish with Socrates’ calm acceptance of death as a deliverance from this world of shadows to a better realm.
Mark

Death in Old and New Testament theology:
- Human beings meant to enjoy God’s presence in this life and not to die.
- Death an evil imposed on Adam and Eve, a distortion of God’s original intentions.
- Israelites came to view death as a realm of alienation from God.
- New Testament (1 Cor 15:26): “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (NRSV).
- Death is not a welcome deliverance, but an enemy – one that cannot conquer because of Jesus’ victory – but still an enemy.
Matthew's Passion Narrative
Matthew’s Passion narrative is very close to Mark’s.

Unlike Mark, in Matthew, Jesus’ disciples had already professed Jesus was the Son of God. Thus their flight from Gethsemane all the more shocking.

Unlike Mark, in Matthew, Peter had declared Jesus as the “the Messiah, Son of the Living God.” Thus his later repeated denials all the more scandalous.
Matthew

Matthew’s gospel was intended for Jewish readers and frequently cites the Old Testament.

The hymn sang by the apostles was possibly a hymn of the Passover liturgy.

References to the Mount of Olives in the Old Testament:
- Zechariah 14:4ff: site where God will judge the world.
- 2 Samuel 15:30-31: David flees to Mount of Olives to weep after betrayal by his trusted advisor Ahitophel.°
Jesus prays alone, sorrowful ("I am deeply grieved. . ."
NRSV 26:38) like the Psalmist in Ps 42:6 ("My soul is cast
down within me. . ." NRSV).

Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane in Matthew especially has echoes of the Lord’s Prayer:

“My Father” (26:39),

“pray that you may not come into the time of trial” (26:41),

“your will be done” (26:42).
Matthew

Three times Jesus withdraws to pray and returns to find his disciples sleeping.

Literary pattern of “the three”: stories effective and balanced if 3 characters or 3 incidents included.

Underlines the disciples’ continued obliviousness to Jesus’ suffering.

Jesus’ prayer is seemingly effective: he arises, ready to face his betrayer.
Unique in Matthew, Jesus addresses Judas as “Friend” or “Companion” (26:50).

Highlights his betrayal by one who had been an intimate and follower.

The assailant who cuts off the ear of the high priest’s slave is identified as “one of those with Jesus” = a disciple.

Mark: “one of those who stood near” = a bystander.

Luke: “one of those around him” = a disciple.

John: Simon Peter.
Matthew

§ Unique in Matthew is Jesus’ rebuke: “Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (NRSV 26:52).

§ Jesus seems helpless against those arresting him: only in Matthew does Jesus explain: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels. But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” (NRSV 26:53-54).
Agony in the Garden, El Greco

Arrest of Jesus (Kiss of Judas), Giotto

Luke’s Passion Narrative
Luke’s version of the Passion is significantly different from Mark / Matthew. It provides a “bridge” between Mark / Matthew and the John’s version.

Luke describes the disciples with great delicacy during Jesus’ ministry and Passion (unlike Mark, who dwells on their failings).

Luke does not mention they flee when Jesus is arrested.

Luke places male acquaintance of Jesus at Calvary.
Jesus leads the disciples to a customary place in the Mount of Olives.
So Judas will have no problem finding him.
Luke is writing for Gentiles, and avoids Semitisms like “Gethsemane” and “Golgotha.”

There are *no* words of rebuke about the disciples becoming deserters. Jesus had just praised them at the Last Supper: “You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you ... a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (NRSV 22:28-30). °
Unlike Mark/Matthew, Jesus does not withdraw from the large group of disciples, and then again still further from the three, but simply moves a “stone’s throw” (22:41) away.

He returns to find them sleeping only once, and they sleep “because of grief” (22:45).
Luke

Jesus is *not* portrayed as grieving, even unto death. His prayer begins and ends by submission to God’s will (NRSV 22:42):

- Preface: “Father, if you are willing”
- Conclusion: “yet, not my will but yours be done”

Unlike Mark/Matthew, God *answers* his prayer by sending an angel to strengthen him.

“In his anguish he prayed more earnestly…” (NRSV 22:44)

“Anguish” here is Greek *agonia*: the supreme tension of the athlete covered with sweat at the start of a contest.
Unlike Mark and Matthew, Jesus prevents the perverse kiss of Judas by saying: "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" (NRSV 22:48).

The only time Judas addressed by name.

Shows a foreknowledge of Judas’ strategy.

Unique to Luke: Jesus heals the ear of the high priest’s slave:

As he had so often healed during his ministry, even in the midst of peril, Jesus heals an opponent.
The figures arresting Jesus are not a crowd (Mark/Matthew) or temple police (John) sent by the chief priests, scribes and elders, but are the chief priests, the Temple officers and elders themselves (22:52).

Scene ends with the dramatic announcement “… this is your hour, and the power of darkness!” (NRSV 22:53).
John’s Passion Narrative
John

John’s portrait of Jesus differs dramatically from Mark / Matthew / Luke (the “Synoptics”):

- He is conscious of his pre-existence.
- In death, he is returning to the state he temporarily left for this world.
- He is not a victim at anyone’s mercy; he has freely chosen to lay down his life.
- Satan has no power over him (14:30).
- He is omniscient; he cannot be caught off guard by what will happen next.
John

There is *no* prayer at Gethsemane that this hour and cup might pass from him. Such human indecision inconceivable in John’s Jesus.

He and the Father are one (10:30).

He is *eager* to drink the cup the Father has given (18:11).
Unlike in Mark, Jesus is not confronted by the sudden arrival of Judas and the arresting party. Instead, Jesus has been expecting Judas, and he *goes forth* to meet him (18:4).

Ironically, Judas now comes with the artificial light of lanterns and torches.

Judas had become one of those who love the darkness rather the light that has come into the world (3:19). John reminds us that when Judas left Jesus, it was truly night (13:30).
At his arrest, Jesus uses the divine name “I AM” (18:6): no one can take his life unless he permits it.

At his words, the civil and religious worldly powers trying to arrest Jesus fall to the ground.

The Roman soldiers and Temple police still have power over Jesus’ followers who remain in this world (17:15), so Jesus protects his followers by asking that they be let go (18:8).
Next week: THE DEATH of the MESSIAH
Jesus Before The Jewish Authorities