

## **“How Do You Deal with Adversity?”**

**Mark 14:12-26**

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Frankfort, Kentucky

September 4, 2016

### **Communion Devotion**

This morning our attention is drawn to the final meal Jesus had with his disciples before his crucifixion. We often refer to this event as The Last Supper, and it has been the subject of many sermons, devotions, plays and paintings.

Mark, the first gospel writer, will be our playwright today and provide the details of that emotionally charged encounter between Jesus and his disciples. We are indebted to him for including this event in his concise portrayal of Jesus' life so it can be handed down to us.

Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem to observe Passover, which commemorated the departure of the ancient Israelites from bondage in Egypt in search of freedom and a homeland. Like thousands of other Hebrews who gathered with family or friends, they ate the Seder meal and recalled the story of the night their ancestors hurriedly left Egypt under Moses' leadership.

After preparations were made for that meal, Jesus and his disciples arrived in the Upper Room. Sometime during that meal, Jesus turned the attention away from the ancient Israelites and the Exodus, and he focused upon what was going to happen later that night.

“I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me,” Jesus told them, “one who is eating with me.” (Mark 14:18)

None of the disciples could believe what they were hearing and were certain they would never do something this despicable.

“It is one of the twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread in the bowl with me.” (Mark 14:21)

Knowing this, Jesus still continued with the Seder. He gave thanks for the bread and passed the loaf around the table for them to tear off a piece. Likewise, he took the cup and after giving thanks, he passed it around the table.

Then he told them this would be the last Passover they would observe together, but it would not be the last time they would break bread and share the cup.

“I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 14:25)

After saying this, they sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives so Jesus could pray.

I have been reading this passage and telling this story for years. I saw something in it last week, however, I had not noticed.

This text reveals how Jesus handled adversity, his deepest level of disappointment and pain. **He faced his stiffest challenges with gratitude, hope and courage.**

What did Jesus do before he passed the bread and cup around the table to his disciples? **He prayed and expressed his gratitude to God.**

Gratitude for what? Certainly, God’s guiding hand and faithful support of his ancestors as they left Egypt in search of a new and better life were on his mind, but don’t you think his list included other things? I do.

I think Jesus expressed gratitude for God’s abiding presence in his life, for the disciples around that table, as flawed as they were, for the people who befriended him along his journey, for the opportunity to make hope visible to so many people struggling to survive and for the way God had used him to make a difference in the world by offering a vision of a better way forward.

The stress Jesus was feeling did not blind him to all that God and others had done for him. Jesus saw their many contributions to his life and ministry, and their goodness and faithfulness lightened the load he was carrying and lifted his spirits.

When you can stare death in the face, as Jesus did that night, and give thanks for your blessings, your load will be lightened, too. Don't let the burdens you are carrying keep you from seeing God's provisions and the way others have helped you along your journey.

**Jesus also faced his toughest challenges with hope in his heart.** For me, a key word in this passage is 'until'.

"I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine **until** that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:25)

How could Jesus talk about the future knowing what was waiting for him in the Garden of Gethsemane? That very night, Judas would betray him, Peter would openly deny him, and the next day he would be crucified for speaking truth to power.

What was the basis for Jesus' hope? He believed in the 'always more of God'. Jesus knew God would have the final word in his life, not his enemies, and it would be good. His faith was in a God who was always working to bring good out of bad and life out of death.

As Christians, our faith is, too. We believe if God can reach into a guarded and sealed tomb and give life back to his crucified Son, God can redeem us and give us new life. It is this blessed assurance that replaces our despair with hope and darkness with light.

**Jesus faced his steepest challenges with courage and strength.** In spite of all the turmoil around him and the anxiety inside him that night in the Upper Room, Jesus led the disciples in singing a song of praise to God and hope for the future. Then he opened that door and left that safe place in order to complete his divine mission.

When you can stare death in the face and break out in song, it means you have more in your heart than fear. You have a faith that provides the strength and courage you need to do the difficult.

I hope you have this kind of faith, a faith that helps you to face your challenges with gratitude, hope and courage. As we gather around this table, ask the Lord to show you what you can do to strengthen your faith so you will be prepared for this week's challenges. I assure you God will meet you where you are and graciously respond to this request.