

Mark 14.12–26

Jesus is... the bread of life

Amington

Sunday 24 March 2019

Mark: Seeing Jesus [43]

Controversy

Everyone likes a good controversy – especially ad agencies. Take a look at this McDonald's recruitment ad from Sweden... **J**

**We don't hire Turks,
Greeks, Poles, Indians,
Ethiopians, Vietnamese,
Chinese or Peruvians.**

Nor Swedes, South Koreans or Norwegians. We hire individuals. We don't care what your surname is. Because ambition and determination have nothing to do with your nationality. McDonald's® is one of the most integrated companies in Sweden, with as many as ninety-five nationalities working for us. Join us at mcdonalds.se



The small print reads:

Nor Swedes, South Koreans or Norwegians. We hire individuals. We don't care what your surname is. Because ambition and determination have nothing to do with your nationality. McDonald's is one of the most integrated companies in Sweden, with as many as ninety-five nationalities working for us. Join us at mcdonalds.se.

Immigration is perhaps *the* political hot potato of the moment, one of the main reasons why people voted for Brexit and Donald Trump, so it's perhaps no surprise that marketing agencies are finding ways of exploiting it.

However, as controversial as immigration is these days, we have one of the most controversial statements ever spoken by anyone ever in our reading this morning. Did anyone spot it? It comes in v22: Jesus said **ⲓ, 'This is my body.'**

Countless books have been written, arguments had, and sadly blood spilt over what Jesus meant by that. I wonder what *you* think Jesus meant when he said that?

Today we are going to think about it using **ⲓ** the three Rs: **ⲓ** rescue, **ⲓ** responsibility, and **ⲓ** gratitude (!).

Rescue (12-16)

There are a few **J** red herrings in today's passage, so I'm going to name them quickly and move on.

The first is the date on which all this took place (12), and whether or not Mark and John agree. Part of the problem is the way in which the Jews counted *evening* as the start of the day, rather than going midnight to midnight, as we do.

The second is how Jesus knew about the room – it was unusual for a man to be **carrying a jar of water** (13), so the argument goes Jesus must have made the arrangements beforehand. Or, was it a display of Jesus' supernatural knowledge?

Third is how many people were in the upper room – was it just Jesus and the Twelve, or were there more of them – the room is described as *mega* (**large**) after all (15).

These are the sorts of things scholars worry about. It's important to ask difficult questions and try to work out exactly what's going on in the Bible – as long as we don't miss the wood for the trees.

And here, the wood – that is, Mark's main point – is that all this was taking place during the Passover.

He says it four times **J**:

1. **Passover lamb** (12)
2. **eat the Passover** (12)
3. **eat the Passover** (14)
4. **prepared the Passover** (16)

As Ray said last week, Mark is a man of few words – so when he repeats things it's a good sign he thinks it's important. So what was the Passover, and why is it so important we know this took place during the Passover?

All the way back in the book of Exodus, something like 1500 years before Jesus was born, God's people were slaves in Egypt. They cried out to him, and he sent them Moses and his brother Aaron to deliver them from the king of Egypt, or Pharaoh.

But Pharaoh was stubborn, and so God sent the famous **J** ten plagues to ruin Egypt as punishment for the way they had treated the Israelites – each time Pharaoh could have averted disaster by letting God's people go, and each time he refused. After the seventh plague (hail) Pharaoh's own advisors told him to let the Israelites go: **'Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?'** they asked him (Exodus 10.7).

But it wasn't until the tenth and final plague that Pharaoh finally allowed the Israelites to leave. The firstborn male, from Pharaoh to the lowest slave, even including the cattle, would be killed.

That night the Israelites were to kill a lamb, roast it over the fire, and make bread without yeast to eat alongside it (Exodus 12.8). And, more importantly, **J** they were to put some of the blood of the lamb on the sides and tops of the door-frames of their houses.

J 'The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.'

Exodus 12.13 (NIV)

The blood of the sacrificed lambs both *identified* God's people, and *rescued* them from death.

For centuries since the Jewish people have celebrated the Passover, in which they look back to that defining night. 'We are them,' they say, 'and they are us... **we are the people who were rescued.**'

It is no coincidence that Jesus was killed at the Passover – *at the exact time the Passover lambs were being killed*. To put it crudely, Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb, sacrificed once and for all, and whose blood both identifies and rescues God's people from slavery and death.

Responsibility (17-21)

A vicar was in the middle of a sermon when he suddenly beckoned to the church warden to come over. The vicar said to her, ‘That man in the third row is asleep. Wake him up.’ The warden replied, ‘You put him to sleep; *you* wake him up!’

We have here another one of those § Markan sandwiches. As Ray said last week, the sandwich doesn’t have to contain meat – so here’s a bean burger – today the sandwich filling is about *responsibility*.

Jesus and his disciples arrived in the *mega* (**large**) upstairs room, furnished (15) with plush carpets so they could recline for their meal. It was the kind of intimate meal that you share with close friends or family, where you crowd round a table and spend half the time passing the salt. But all was not well.

Jesus had spent the last three years travelling, talking, sailing, fishing, eating with these twelve men – and now one of them was about to betray him (18).

They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, ‘Surely you don’t mean me?’

Mark 12.19 (NIV)

You can't be betrayed by an enemy or an acquaintance, because betrayal first requires trust. In Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* the famous line, § 'Et tu, Brute?' – 'Even you, Brutus?' – shows it is the friend's stab that hurts the most.

But what are we to make of verse 21?

'It is one of the Twelve,' he replied, 'one who dips bread into the bowl with me. § The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'

Mark 14.20-21 (NIV)

Presumably Jesus had in mind the prophecy in Psalm 41.9:

Even my close friend,
 someone I trusted,
one who shared my bread,
 has turned against me.

Psalm 41.9 (NIV)

Even the thirty pieces of silver Judas took was prophesied, by Zechariah (11.12-13).

So, if it was inevitable that Jesus would be betrayed by one of his close friends for thirty pieces of silver, how can it be Judas' fault?

It's a tricky question. We tend to assume that *either* God is in control *or* we have freedom to choose, as if the two are equal and mutually exclusive, that is, it's one or the other – ¶ like these shapes. A shape can't be *both* a triangle *and* a circle. It doesn't make sense.

But what if God's will and human will are actually *totally different things* ¶ like a square and the colour red? After all the Bible tells us God's thoughts and God's ways are not like ours – we simply can't understand the mind of God. ¶ A red square makes a lot more sense than a triangular circle. It's not a perfect analogy, but I find it a helpful way to think about this question.

So, although it was inevitable that Jesus would be betrayed by one of his close friends, Judas was still responsible for his choice.

And actually, was Judas the only one who betrayed Jesus? Only a short while later, the other eleven ran away, deserting Jesus as he was arrested, and Peter said he'd never even heard of Jesus (14.71).

Which begs the rather more difficult question: how often do *we* betray Jesus *in exactly the same way* as Peter? How often do we speak or act as if we've never heard of Jesus?

How often do we gossip or grumble, how often do we make snide remarks, how often do we push God down our list of priorities so he doesn't get in the way of what's *more* important to us – things like family, for example?

Like Judas, like Peter, we *all* betray Jesus, in many different ways.

But thankfully God's story with us doesn't end there.

Gratitude (22-26)

A family was having dinner on Mother's Day. For some reason the mother was unusually quiet. Finally, her husband asked what was wrong.

'Nothing,' said the woman.

Not buying it, he asked again: 'Seriously, what's wrong?'

'Do you really want to know? Well I'll tell you. I have cooked and cleaned and fed the kids for fifteen years, and on Mother's Day you don't even tell me so much as "thank you".'

'Why should I?' he said. 'Not once in fifteen years have I received a gift on Father's Day.'

'Yes,' she said, 'but I'm actually their mother.'

We've had two of the three Rs so far: Rescue and Responsibility. Now it's time for the third: Gratitude.

The controversial sentence is upon us. § **'This is my body,'** Jesus said (22). What did he mean by that?

Well it's possible to make too much of that little word 'is', and too little. People have pointed out that Jesus didn't speak Greek, he spoke Aramaic, which doesn't use the present tense of the verb 'to be', so he would actually have said, 'This bread, my body.'

However frankly that's another one of these §.

Jesus' body was physically present when he said these words, and he was quite clearly holding a piece of bread, and a cup of wine – neither of which 'are' flesh or blood. So what's going on?

§ This is Jess. Actually it *isn't*, because Jess is sitting over there. What I mean is: § this is *a picture of* Jess.

§ This is Amington. Actually it *isn't*, because it is a road sign. What I mean is: § this is [where] Amington [begins].

Hold up a wedding ring.

§ This is love. Actually it *isn't*, it's a wedding ring. What I mean is: § this is [a sign of my] love [for my wife].

We understand all those readily enough – so what did Jesus mean when he said ¶ **‘This is my body... this is my blood’** (22 & 24)?

Like all those other examples, the bread and wine are signs, pointing not to themselves but to something else. The sign is important, but it’s not as important as the thing it points to.

So what are the bread and the wine pointing to?

Remember ¶ this is a Markan sandwich – so where did we begin? With the *Passover*... ¶ and the first R was? *Rescue*. Only this time, ¶ *Jesus* is the sacrificial lamb, and it’s *his* blood that identifies and rescues us, once and for all – he *is* the bread of life.

In the original Passover God’s people were rescued from slavery to the ¶ Egyptians, but now he rescues us from slavery to *sin*, to the death we are responsible for bringing on ourselves ¶ by our sin, rebelling against God and betraying him, selfish and full of pride.

In the original Passover the Israelites passed the bread around with the words, ‘this is the bread of affliction’, identifying themselves with their ancestors, whom God rescued from slavery in Egypt. But now we pass the bread around with the words, ‘this is the body of Christ,’ identifying ourselves as belonging to Jesus, who rescues us from slavery to sin – which leads to death.

There is much more to say about the bread and wine of what we now call holy communion – and we'll be coming back to it after Easter. For now it is enough to say that receiving the bread and wine of communion is one of the ways God has given us to identify ourselves with the wonderful rescue won for us by Jesus.

And so we come to land on the third R: **§ gratitude**. The Israelites gratefully looked back to their rescue from slavery in Egypt – we gratefully look back to the day on which Jesus, the Lamb of God, gave his life to rescue us from slavery to sin.

But we also look *forwards*, to the secret **§ fourth R**... (1) **§ Rescue**, (2) **§ Responsibility**, (3) **§ Gratitude**, (4) **§ Return**.

One day Jesus will return and **drink new wine in the kingdom of God**, he said (25). We don't know when, but we know it will happen – and so, like the **§ USS Enterprise** in *Star Trek*, God calls us to boldly go into that future, taking the message of his wonderful rescue with us, confident that one day Jesus will return and make his home with us, forever.

Looking back, looking forward, looking out – this is the life God calls us to.