

Now What?

I find it very interesting to take note of what material shows up in all four of the Gospels, or what is just in the Synoptics and not John, (or, *just* in John – but you’ll have to come back on Sunday for that!), and so forth. And then there are those teachings and narratives that only appear in one of the Gospels...and in fact, all four Gospels have material that is unique to them.

Which shouldn’t be surprising, since even though they are all telling the same story, they are telling it from slightly different perspectives. At least three of them (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) likely had access to the same source material, but all the gospel writers were *there*, so, just like our memories of a ‘family vacation’ – different events, happenings will stand out to each member of the family as they ‘recall’ the time.

Everyone remembers the hike up “Old Rag Mountain” which was so beautiful and challenging, but not everyone would necessarily recall the dinner when Dad dumped all the macaroni on the ground while trying to drain it with a pot lid... (of course *that* never happened!)

Anyway, those unique passages are especially interesting to me... they are there, presumably, because they had a special meaning to the writer, the ‘editor’ of that particular Gospel. Now, when it comes to the Passion texts, I’m especially intrigued by the details that are found in only one of the Gospels. And again, they *all* have unique material.

But in the accounts of what happened on Thursday night - *tonight* – there is actually quite a bit of agreement among the Synoptics. The institution of the Sacrament of Communion, Jesus predicting his betrayal, the arguments over who is greatest... on to the Garden of Gethsemane, where this unimaginable spiritual wrestling takes place while the disciples... sleep... nearby. Followed by Judas’ betrayal and Jesus’ arrest and his denial and abandonment by all the disciples.

John, of course, goes differently – recording Jesus washing the disciple’s feet, and his high priestly prayer for the unity of the future church, then on to the Garden.

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It's a story we have come to know very well. But tucked into Luke's account of this night are some words of Jesus that we typically seem to gloss over. Maybe because they are hard to understand. It's the passage we read earlier tonight, from Luke 22.

Let me refresh your memory:

Jesus has just predicted Peter's denial of him, which, of course, Peter vehemently objects to, telling Jesus that he would, in fact, be willing to die for him. (Let's remember that detail.)

In all the other Gospels, at this point, they leave the Upper Room and head out to the Mount of Olives singing a hymn... where the night of prayer begins. But in *Luke*, before that happens, Jesus has one more teaching for them...

Here's what he said:

³⁵ *Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"*

[You probably know that Jesus is referring here to the sending out of the 72 disciples in a mission as recorded in Luke 10 – his instructions to them included these words: ³ *Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.* ⁴ *Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.*]

³⁵ *Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered.*

³⁶ *He said to them, "But **now** if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.* ³⁷ *It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."*

³⁸ *The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords." "That is enough," he replied...*

What exactly is Jesus telling these disciples here? The most obvious question that arises from this has to do with his statement about the sword – "*If you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.*" Was Jesus speaking literally here? And if so, *why*?

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There is some division on this among Biblical scholars. There are commentators who believe that he was, in fact, speaking literally. That Jesus is saying something like this: “Everything is about to change. It’s going to get rough. So be ready to defend yourself! Buy a sword. You’re going to need it.”

Those who come down here, would put this in the category of the parable of the shrewd manager – one of the most difficult of all Jesus’ parables, where the master seems to be applauding dishonesty because it helps him get ahead in the world (a parable, interestingly enough, which is found only in Luke!). Or, Jesus’ statement in Matthew 10 that we should “be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” in this world.

The ‘sword’ referred to here is not a broadsword, as a Roman Centurion would use, but a sort of a dagger. The ‘handgun’ of the day. More of a defensive weapon, not an offensive one. So, Jesus may be warning the disciples that the world was about to become very dangerous and they needed to be prepared to live in this world, which at times is going to require some self-defense in order for the mission to be fulfilled. (A certain associate pastor who has my utmost respect accepts this interpretation.)

I have some problems with it, however, mainly because nowhere else in the Gospels does Jesus ever condone violence in the spreading of the Gospel, even in self-defense.

But also, because of what happened later that same night: *[after prayer in the Garden]*

⁴⁷ *While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*

⁴⁹ *When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.*

⁵¹ *But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.*

⁵² *Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”*

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So, obviously, the disciples took Jesus' teaching literally. And at least one of them - we know from John's gospel that it was Peter - doesn't even wait for Jesus' answer. Presumably, at least one of those two swords gets drawn, and Peter - true to his word! (remember, he said he would die for Jesus) - Peter draws that little sword and takes a swing. In the face of being tremendously outnumbered, out-armed, and out-trained, this was a suicide mission. (I've always presumed too, that Peter wasn't aiming at the high priest's *servant*, more than likely, he just got in the way of his true target.) The rest of them were simply waiting for Jesus' word: "Let's go, boys! Fight to the death!" And, I believe, they would have, don't you?

How utterly confusing it must have been for those disciples then, to hear Jesus' firm voice: STOP! "No more of this!"

Matthew adds:

⁵² "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "**for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.**" ⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

Jesus stops the fighting almost before it begins, he heals the servant and *chastises* the disciples once again for their misunderstanding. "All who draw the sword will die by the sword!" He reminds them of the resources he had available if it were his desire to meet the world on its own terms. Surely he is wondering, "How many times to I have to explain this: my kingdom is not of this world! That means that it is not going to be established by the rules of this world."

All of which are based on power... on force.

Back to the Upper Room... after Jesus' speech...remember, the disciples produced their two swords. And Jesus says, "That is enough." Those words can just as easily be translated: "Enough of this..." Not an affirmation about the adequacy of their 'military might' but words of exasperation... "*That's enough of this conversation.*" You just aren't getting it...but it's too late.

Whether we accept Jesus' words as literal or metaphorical, we can all agree on this: Jesus certainly *was* warning his disciples that things were about to change. And just as powerful as the symbolism of buying a sword was his suggestion that they 'sell their cloak' in order to do that -

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you see, a cloak was essential gear. The nights in this desert climate got very frosty, and you could freeze out there. So, you see, Jesus is saying clearly that things are changing and they better be ready for it. One commentator, who takes the sword reference to be symbolic, put it like this: “Just because Jesus was not thinking of their weapons, the disciples (still) needed the courage which regards a sword as more necessary than a cloak, and which will surrender its last possession but cannot give up the fight.”

Jesus, surely was warning the disciples: we’re in for a fight! It is all about to begin! Tonight! That change is perhaps most clearly described in the last statement that Jesus made in this challenging passage:

³⁷ *It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”*

Again, as I was saying last Sunday, we can’t really understand *any* of the days in this Holy Week without considering them in their context. Just a few days ago we celebrated “Palm Sunday”; we talked about the meaning of the shout ‘Hosanna!’, the understanding that this call which once meant, “Please save us!” had come to mean “Salvation *has come!*” Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Jesus, for the most part – especially in public – to this point, has been welcomed wherever he went. Great crowds gathered to hear him teach, to simply touch the hem of his robe. There was a great curiosity about him, so much so that even leaders (like king Herod) had become interested. The Pharisees and scribes on Palm Sunday grumbled: “The whole world has gone after him!”

But as we know, that all was about to change, and change *quickly*. Instead of being welcomed as the Son of David, Jesus was about to become ‘numbered with the transgressors’, quoting Isaiah 53: 12. In other words, he was going to be considered a criminal. An outcast. And as Jesus himself said earlier, “If they do these things to me, what will they do to you?”

So here on this last night before it all happens, Jesus gives one final warning: friends, the world is about to get hostile. This is the ‘theatre’ in which we are to preach the Gospel.

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Jesus will die in this world... crucified between two thieves. But even in his death he offers hope and forgiveness. "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

And we, as the 2009 editions of Jesus' disciples are bearers of this Good News that forgiveness is available from God, no matter how we have sinned in the past. But we share this message knowing that the world may not welcome it – forgiveness requires acknowledgement of wrong and repentance. We know that the messengers will be scrutinized relentlessly, and very possibly mocked, resisted, and even persecuted.

We must be prepared to sustain ourselves on our journey. We need to realize that we're in it for the long haul. We must be determined that we will not back down to threats and hardships and other difficult ties. Friends, some will even die to further this cause for which Jesus died. But it is a worthy cause: to bring redemption to the world, to offer hope and healing to people just like you and me.

So, as Dr. Ralph Wilson wrote: "Get a backpack and some cash for your trip – and even a sword, if need be. But do not let fear or threats deter you from this great journey to bring salvation and freedom to a world in bondage. Jesus felt it was worthy of his life, and as his disciples, so must we."¹

¹ [Http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessong/22_35-38.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessong/22_35-38.htm)