

People of God, every time the word “immediately” is used in Mark, it should be better translated as Straightway, because Mark’s is showing us how Christ makes the way straight back to God, and he is teaching his disciples how they are supposed to walk on the straight way.

That straightway is the way of the cross, the way of humility, and the way of obedience even unto death. And in the mystery of God’s sovereignty, and the plans of wicked men, Jesus walks the straightway of the cross in order to make straight the way for us back to God.

However, Mark also shows us, through heavy use of irony, that the enemies of Christ themselves are also “straightway” doing this and that, but their actions are antithetical to true discipleship and to the kingdom of God.

Thus we see in our text this morning. V. 43 – *“And straightway, while we was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him, a crowd with swords and club, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.” And he straightway came up to him and said, “Rabbi!” And he kissed him.”*

We have seen in chp. 8 that Jesus had questioned his disciples about what they were talking about while they were on the way. And they fell silent because they were arguing about who was the greatest. And in chapter 10 when they are on the way to go up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man would be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes to be killed, the disciples again, James and John this time, clueless as to what Jesus is teaching them, ask Jesus to grant that they would sit at his right hand and his left in his glory.

They did not know what they were talking about, for if they had ,they would have known they were asking to be crucified with Christ. But the disciples wanted earthly greatness. They wanted earthly glory and power and rule, like the Gentiles. They want the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. They

want Jesus to be the kind of leader like the zealots wanted. A strong man to overthrow the existing order with violence and to slay the wicked and to bring in the kingdom of God by violence and force. They wanted a revolutionary. They wanted power and at least Judas also wanted money. Money and power are the things which always attract people to join revolutionary movements, and are always the cause for fighting.

St. James figures it out eventually and says, *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* <sup>2</sup>*You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.* <sup>3</sup>*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* <sup>4</sup>*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

Judas, who was once Jesus' friend, has now become his enemy, because his passions are at war within him, and he doesn't have what he wants, so he fights. He has become a friend of the world and seeks to use the world's means to get his way.

It was most likely during the time that Jesus and the twelve were in the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany, that Judas made his decision to betray Christ. Jesus is not the strong military leader Judas was looking for. And truth be told, there are many in the evangelical wing of the church who also are looking to bring in the kingdom through some other way than what Jesus has in mind.

I mean, we need a warrior, right? We need strong leadership. We need a king like all the other nations. But this guy Jesus, he hangs out with lepers and women, and they are pouring oil on him, and then to make it worse, he even washes his disciples feet, doing the job of a slave. What is with this guy? We need a real man to lead this group.

And so, being filled with the pride of life, love of money, and envious for power, Judas opens himself up to Satan and betrays Jesus over to the chief priests and the elders becoming a friend of the world.

And when Judas shows up in the garden, His revolutionary and violent passions and desires for power and control and money have taken over him. And so, “straightway,” Judas comes, with a crowd brandishing swords and clubs. We know what way Judas is walking on. And it is not the straight way of the Son of Man, it is the “straight way” of revolutionary force and violent takeover. It is the highway to hell. It is the abandonment of Christ. It is friendship with the world.

Well, Peter sees the band of soldiers and recognizes what is going on. And now his revolutionary instincts and earthly passions take over also. Peter said he would die for Jesus, and now he is finally getting his chance to prove his worth. This is the moment he has been waiting for. And so he swings his sword.

Because he couldn't watch and pray with Christ for one hour in the Garden he is not prepared for this trial that has come upon him. And so, being blinded by his desires and passions for power, he solves the problem the only way he knows how, which to grab the sword and fight with the passions of the flesh.

How many of us often do something similar? We have not been walking in the spirit, we haven't been praying, we haven't been reading, we are out of sorts and running off of the fumes of our own strength, and in that moment, the trial comes upon us, and we reach for the only weapon we know how to wield, and we fail. We fail because we rely upon our own strength to carry us through the moment, only to find that our strength actually takes us away from Jesus.

Now it is interesting, Mark doesn't actually use Peter's name here as being the one who grabbed the sword. We know it was Peter because John tells

us it was in his gospel. But Mark doesn't identify Peter as being the one who cuts off the servant's ear.

I think that is because Mark is showing in a subtle way in this scene in Gethsemane, the total degradation of discipleship among the twelve, and especially Peter. Peter can't watch with Jesus in prayer, so Jesus calls him Simon, his name before being chosen to be with Jesus as one of the twelve. So he gets downgraded for that. But now, by taking up the sword, he doesn't even have a name, he has no identity with Christ when he takes up arms. He is regarded merely as, "one of those who stood by."

The disciples falsely think that God's kingdom is going to be maintained and advanced through the edge of the sword and the through the use of political and military force. Both Peter and Judas, though on opposite sides, are actually birds of feather. Peter thinks he is being loyal to Jesus. Judas is throwing his lot in with the establishment, and even thinks himself a leader of men, issuing commands to the soldiers, "The one who I kiss, seize him, and put him under guard."

Judas and Peter both think the kingdom of God comes by show of force. And Peter takes the first swipe and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. Both of them are engaged in the same type of behavior, locked in mimetic rivalry, and therefore, they are actually on the same side, which is, they both have become friends with the world.

We know from John's gospel that the name of the high priest's servant who had his ear cut off was Malchus, and we know from Luke that Jesus healed the man's ear. And we know from Matthew that Jesus denounces Peter's actions and says, "Don't you know that all who live by the sword die by the sword."

But Mark doesn't mention any of that. Jesus doesn't even acknowledge the action of Peter in cutting off the ear of the servant. Instead Christ addresses the group of soldiers and says,

“Have you come out as against an insurrectionist with swords and clubs.” Or another way of translating that sentence is, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you come after me with swords and clubs.”

And even though Peter, this unnamed person who is standing by, is trying to protect Christ by drawing his sword, the sheer fact he takes up arms and fights in his own strength and does not have the things of God in mind, is enough for Christ to consider him as another one of those who came out against him with swords and clubs. Christ just lumps him right in with the rest.

They think, under the information given to them by Judas, that Jesus and the eleven would have been armed to the teeth, and ready to fight. That is of course what the disciples wanted. And of course Judas thought that. And Peter thought that it should be so.

But when we look at the groups standing there in the Garden, who is in fact leading a rebellion here? It's not Jesus. No, it's all those who entered into the Garden with swords and clubs, because they are at odds with the way of kingdom of God. The hypocrisy is heavy. They come out as to fight against a man leading a rebellion, but they are the ones with swords and clubs, leading their own rebellion against the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God that Jesus Christ has been advocating does not advance its agenda through revolutionary violence. That is why Jesus says, “Day after day I was with you in the Temple teaching...teaching, during the day time, right in front of everybody, and you didn't seize me then. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.” And they all fled.

Once the disciples all realized that Jesus wasn't going to fight, they abandoned him. They all fled.

You know, People of God, it is in the hour of trial, in the moment of adversity, that most is required of us. But often we find that we do not rise to the occasion, and instead, the worst comes out of us. Either like Peter

we are brash and loud and haughty, or we are sneaky and clever like Judas. Or we have false bravado like those other disciples who just swore that they would die with Jesus, but then abandon him when small opposition arises. We are often like the disciples in many ways, and most often it is not in the straightway of the Son of God, it is in the “straightways” of our own strength and passion and pride. We abandon our friendship with Christ and befriend the world instead.

Once it becomes clear to the disciples that Jesus has no interest in fighting with earthly power, they all think he is the leader of a lost cause, and they all leave him.

But Jesus has been fighting from the very beginning. He fought with the Devil, he fought with the demons, he fought against unbelief, he fought against sickness and disabilities, he fought against lies, he fought against oppression, he fought against temptation. And Jesus is continuing to fight.

In fact, when Jesus said in the upper room that he was not going to drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when he drinks it new in the kingdom of God, some commentators see in that a Nazarite Vow in which Jesus separated himself unto Holy War. Which is why Jesus is then seen as drinking sour wine on the cross, because his holy war was over, and the victory was won.

But here in the Garden of Gethsemane all the disciples are still blind, deaf, and have no understanding. They really think they have to fight with swords and clubs to advance the kingdom. And when they see that Jesus doesn't engage in that kind of warfare, so they leave him and flee. Jesus has been another lost cause.

But G.K. Chesterton picks up on something important here and he said, “The one perfectly divine thing, the one glimpse of God's paradise given on earth, is to fight a losing battle - and not lose it.” But the only way to not lose a losing battle it is to fight God's way. But the disciples aren't interested

in fighting the battle God's way, they are only interested in fighting with the weapons of the flesh. And so they flee and abandon Christ.

We have battles raging in our own day, and in our own selves, do we not? We have people who are trying to take Christ away again and kill him by attempting to destroy Christianity. Now, this of course is an impossibility. The Kingdom of God and the Church can never die. The more you persecute us the more we increase and the more dedicated the true saints become. Every time the Church is killed she just resurrects again. So we have no fear of the Church being eradicated. As long as Christ lives in Heaven at the Right hand of God, the Church will continue. But there are some of us whose first instinct is the grab your AR.

First of all, let us not act as if the churches existence depends upon our own human strength and will and that our faith needs to be defended with violence. *"The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete."* In other words, we have to fight with God's weapons. Not swords and clubs and AR's.

But it is far easier to fight in our own strength than in the strength of the Spirit, because the one is natural. It is of the flesh. It's what we know. So we need to become a people who are more familiar with the weapons of God's warfare, and we need to be praying and obeying the Father's will, as Jesus did.

Now none of this was a surprise to our Lord. All of this was prophesied to happen. The Scriptures needed to be fulfilled.

Psalms 86:14 says, "O God, insolent men have risen up against me; a band of ruthless men seek my life, and they do not set you before them."

Psalm 41:9 says, Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”

Zech. 13:7 “Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered”

And thus it says, after they lay hands on him to seize him, “they all left him and fled.”

Now, this language of laying hands on Jesus is reminiscent of the sacrifices. When the worshiper would bring the animal for the sin offering he would lay his hands on the lamb, and slay it, identifying himself with the animal. Jesus is the Passover Lamb, and the Passover lambs were being sacrificed during this time. And so the collective hands of humanity have their hands upon him to seize him and to lead him to his death.

People of God, In the lust of our flesh and the passions of our hearts, and our desire to force the world into our image, the iniquity of our hearts have caused us to trespass against the Lord’s anointed and lay hands on him, and seize him to put him to death. Why? Because Christ always stands in the way ready to ask us if we are willing to lay down the sinful passions of our desires and follow him, or are we going to lay hands on him to kill him in order to get our way.

All such actions we commit which are fueled by our lust for power and the pride of life, can only be accomplished by first laying hands on Jesus, seizing him, leading him under guard to be crucified. You must kill the Son of God again before you can have your way. Are you willing to do that? Can you bear that guilt? Jesus is trying to teach us a new way, the way of the Son of God, and in that new and living way where we carry our own cross and crucify those desires, we will actually find the life we so desperately want. But all too often our passions rule us, and we crucify the Son of God afresh everyday.

Let us look at one last thing here, this weird detail about a naked man running away, and we will draw it to a close. A young man is following Jesus

wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seize him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

There is much speculation about what this is about. Undoubtedly it is another example of one of the disciples who was following Jesus abandons him and flees. So with the unnamed Peter, the betrayer Judas, and the rest of the disciples, now this young man joins the ranks of those who abandon Christ.

Now, today most people think that this young man is Mark, and this is his signature passage. Just like how many film directors will write themselves into their own films and have a cameo appearances, Mark is doing the same here. That is possible.

But I think there is something else going on here. This person is described as a young man. This means more than just the fact he is a youth. This phrase is often used to describe a man of fighting age. He is a warrior. Now, Jesus says the Scripture must be fulfilled, and in Amos 2 there is a passage about the day of the Lord, and God promises to punish Israel and the judgment will be so unbearable that even “he who is of stout heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day.”

So I think Mark is showing that Jesus’s suffering and death is the day of the Lord, on the one hand, and also that as the true Israel, Christ must undergo total abandonment during this hour of trial.

And so, like the rest of the disciples who swore to fight to the death, this young stout hearted warrior flees when faced with Satanic opposition.

But I think this young man, like many other characters in the story, is also a representative character of all humanity. Like Adam in the Garden, who is naked and afraid of God and hides himself, this young man flees from God the Son in Garden, running away naked. Humanity, even in the strength of our youth, we find ourselves naked and afraid running away from God in the hour of crisis. Rather than be loyal unto death, like the

disciples said they would be, we all fail and fall away and abandon Jesus, and are just like Adam in the garden naked and afraid of God because of our sins, hiding from him. Trying to seize upon the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil the tree of kingly rule and wisdom, we seize Christ and kill him to accomplish our agenda.

But thanks be to God, that is not the end of this character. And that is not the end of our story either, People of God.

We find later in Mark's gospel when Jesus rises from the dead, that the character of the young man shows up again. At the empty tomb the women come to the tomb and they find the stone rolled away, and on the inside of the tomb they find a young man, wearing a white robe, and he is sitting on the right side. I believe these two scenes need to be interpreted together.

The once naked and afraid and ashamed young man, who abandoned Christ in the Garden, now as a result of the death and resurrection of Christ is clothed in white again, and he is sitting at the right hand of God. Jesus Christ's death and resurrection elevates our humanity from the weakness of our sinfulness, and the degradations of the passions of our flesh in which we run away afraid from God in the Garden, and try to seize power and control and dominion on our own terms, which only leads to our death and demise.

God, in Christ's resurrection now clothes us in white and blesses us with a seat at his right hand in resurrection glory. Christ, as the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Kingly tree of dominion, has been put back on the tree when he was put on the cross, and now in Christ we can reign with him properly, on the straightway of the cross.

That I think is the story arc of the naked young man. He is us, and we are him. And we are being transformed from degree of glory to another, being once naked and afraid, and now clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and

glorified in God's presence, in the confidence and joy and reigning with Christ our King.

People of God, we all fail. Each one of us struggles with the pride of life and the passions of the flesh and the desire to rule and control. It is easier for a man to conquer a city than to control his own spirit. And it is easier to swing a sword or lead a battalion of soldiers than carry ones own cross. But if we are to walk on the straightway with Jesus, and not on the "straightway" of Judas, we must be greater friends with God than we are of the world, and humble ourselves and embrace suffering obedience, and then God will exalt us. Amen.