

When We Feel the Sting of Betrayal  
Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

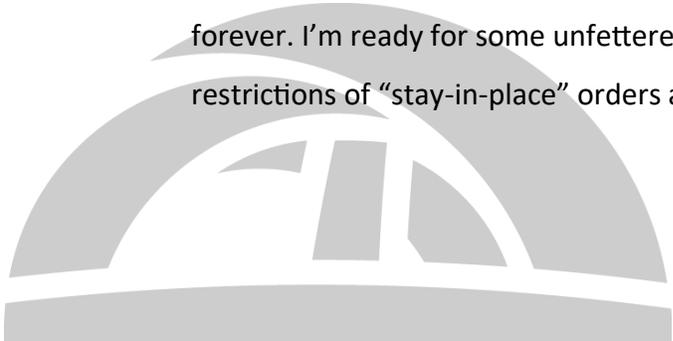
Mark 14:41b-50 NRSV

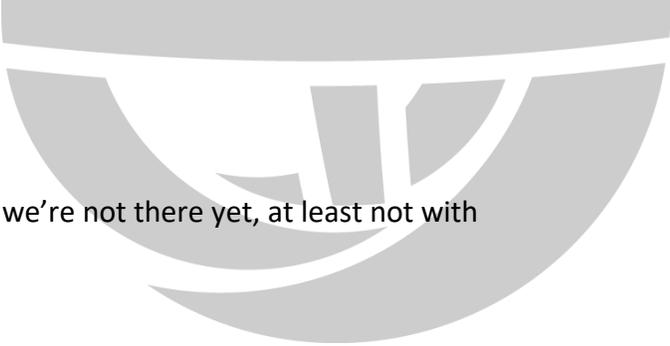
<sup>41b</sup>“The our has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup>Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

<sup>43</sup>Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. <sup>44</sup>Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” <sup>45</sup>So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. <sup>46</sup>Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. <sup>47</sup>But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. <sup>48</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? <sup>49</sup>Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” <sup>50</sup>All of them deserted him and fled.

Over the last few weeks, we have remained in place – both physically, as we have restricted our movements and cleared our calendars due to the presence of a worldwide pandemic. We’ve also remained in place spiritually this Lent as we have focused on Jesus’ time in Gethsemane with his disciples. I’d like to say it’s a nice coincidence that this happened, but it’s not. It’s uncomfortable, bordering on intolerable, to remain in these two places at once. And maybe like me, you’re getting a little tired of it.

Gethsemane is a not a place to dwell long. Just like Lent is not a season we need to hold onto forever. I’m ready for some unfettered good news, some gospel news that liberates us from the restrictions of “stay-in-place” orders and the underlying dis-ease of not knowing how our world is





going to come out on the other side of this. Unfortunately, we're not there yet, at least not with coronavirus.

There's an ages old spiritual name for voicing the kind of dis-ease we are all living with these days. It's called lament. And Scripture is full of it. A full 1/3 of the psalms carry some element of lament in them and the only book in the Bible attributed to an emotion is not Joy, or Hope, or Love – but Lamentations. They are complaints, yearnings, longings, God-honest talk directed at God when life is full of dis-ease.

Gethsemane is a place of dis-ease. It's another critical turning point in Jesus' life. It's not as though we didn't know it was coming. Three times Jesus has told the disciples that he would be betrayed and handed over to authorities and be killed. But now we're there. It's happening. He was right. And like the disciples, we don't exactly know what to do.

Gethsemane becomes a resting place for the disciples despite Jesus' call to them to keep awake. It's a wrestling place for Jesus as he struggles with the cup that God has given him, a cup of betrayal, suffering, and death. As dramatic as these Gethsemane moments are, they are not the ones we want to remember. Gethsemane is not a lush garden of comfort and tranquility, but a desert garden of desertion, unanswered prayers, and betrayal. When it comes down to it, we want to try to explain these events, don't we? It's natural for rational people to ask why. In an age when answers to most our questions come simply by saying "Hey Siri", it's hard not to seek out answers. But what if there is not just one answer, or what if the answers are not discernable at this point? I don't know how many times in the last couple of weeks I've been in a meeting trying to plan something beyond Easter and we've simply had to say, "We just don't know." Perhaps in becoming more familiar with this sense of unknowing, we're also becoming more comfortable with it? Or perhaps this persistent unknowing only adds to the dis-ease of an already stressful time.

We want answers to all the why questions of Jesus' betrayal, much like we want an explanation to why and how coronavirus has spread so rampantly across our world.





It would be easier, less painful to sleep through this scene in Gethsemane and pretend it didn't happen, to ignore the sting of betrayal we feel for our Lord.

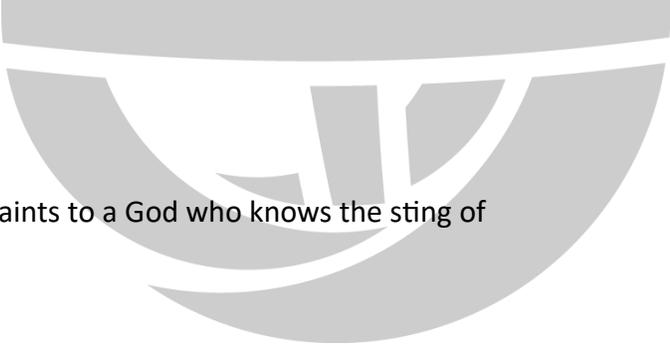
It seems unthinkable that one of Jesus' beloved disciples would betray him to the authorities – and in Mark's gospel – for little or no given reason. Scholars and armchair theologians have pondered for centuries why Jesus was betrayed. Scripture points to it being part of a divine plan, foretold long ago in the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, in other places it seems like more of an accident of history that God eventually acts by improv through the cross and resurrection to redeem a tragic story. How we come to conclusions about why Jesus was betrayed comes down to a matter of faith. What do we trust about this story and how does Jesus' actions guide our faith in him?

But instead of trying to come up with all the answers, to use only our minds in the midst of this tragic scene, what if we led with our feelings – with our heart. Perhaps these Gethsemane moments last long enough to feel the lament for Jesus, and for the world. Perhaps rather than just accepting that Jesus had to die for us, we feel the real loss and the tremendous sacrifice he gave by taking the cup that he so desperately wished would pass from him. As we “remain in place” maybe this is the right time to express our lament to God as we watch an invisible disease shut down our world.

Perhaps Gethsemane is the place to pause long enough to lament that we cannot visit family members we love, milestones delayed or cancelled, or the disruption that has entered every facet of our daily lives.

Dwelling in Gethsemane allows us time to voice our concern and feel deeply for those who are working in hospitals and medical systems that are overwhelmed and to cry out to God over the fear we may have that we could be next. I lament for those who have suddenly lost their jobs and for developing nations who will be far less able to prepare than we are here. Just this week, we were able to sent \$1200 to lambi Hospital in Tanzania to set up a makeshift isolation ward, and next week we are sending \$6500 from the campaign mission tithe to purchase supplies that will help them be better prepared for COVID-19 than they are now. It is something, but it's not going to solve the





disparity. Now is the acceptable time to offer up our complaints to a God who knows the sting of betrayal and hears our cries.

And perhaps this unexpected Gethsemane moment has reminded us of the ways our lives have betrayed us into a false sense of security. We may realize now how harried our schedules have been, how fragmented our relationships are, how utterly bound to wealth and prosperity we are that we have missed some things that are meaningful to us.

Like Gethsemane and Lent, we don't have to stay in lament, but perhaps it's an important stop along the way. It is sometimes necessary to experience absence to understand the power of presence, to witness the sting of betrayal to know just how faithful our Lord is to the world. There is more to Jesus' story, more to Jesus' promise. His reply to betrayal, "Let the scriptures be fulfilled." For God will neither leave us nor forsake us. God will go to whatever lengths necessary to secure our hope in Christ, to unite our hearts with the divine, to turn our mourning into dancing. We are not there yet, but God's mercy and redemption is near. And for today, let that be enough. Amen.

