

The Hour of Jesus
Holy Week Service
Stauffer Chapel, Pepperdine University
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This meditation is a reflection on the readings we have just heard of the events of Jesus' passion as recorded in the gospel of John (chapters 13-19). We refer to this time leading up to the resurrection as holy week, but in the Johannine way of reckoning time it is the HOUR OF JESUS.

As early as the second chapter of John, at a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, Jesus' mother informs him that the wine has run out, to which he responds that his hour has not yet come. Throughout our reading of John's gospel we become aware of an hour that is coming. **It is the hour of Jesus.**

When we come to the 13th chapter, as Jesus shares a meal with his disciples, John tells us that Jesus **knew his hour had come**. Thus, with heightened awareness that his mission is soon to be accomplished, Jesus demonstrates the full extent of his love and washes his disciples' feet. The setting is personal and intimate, filled with Jesus' poignant awareness of betrayal, denial and death, as well as leaving, loving and saying goodbye.

And during supper, Jesus says that one of them will betray him and he is troubled as he says this. We sense the dismay and the anguish of the disciples in their question, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus breaks the agonizing suspense, gives a morsel of bread to Judas, and tells him to do his deed quickly. Thus, in the context of divine love the deceiver of the Son of God is revealed. We must not miss the symbolism of John's language. Judas leaves and it is night. He leaves the circle of light and re-enters the realm of darkness. The hour has come, the journey to the cross has begun and it is night.

As Jesus and his disciples begin their journey he speaks words of comfort and hope to calm their fears. He promises to prepare a dwelling place for them in his Father's house and to return for them. He reveals the nature of life indwelt by the Spirit and lived in the presence of God and in fellowship with Jesus. But he also has hard things to say. It is hard to say goodbye. As they enter the realm that belongs to the prince of darkness he speaks of the hatred they will experience in a hostile world but reassures them that their new life, embedded in the vine, is secure in the love of God. The hour has come and it begins in darkness. Fear and hatred belong to this dark night.

The account of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death reads as a seamless narrative. Even his resurrection in chapter 20 is part of this continuous story, with hardly a pause in between. John places as much emphasis upon those responsible for the events of this night as on the crucified Christ, thereby revealing the character of darkness, as well as the character of the Light of the World.

Jesus and his disciples cross the Kidron Valley to an olive grove. It is a familiar place: Jesus and his disciples have met there frequently. The tone is deceptively peaceful until an ominous note is struck: Judas knew the place, for he had gone there often with Jesus. Judas leads a band of soldiers—temple police—into this peaceful setting. They come with lamps, torches, and weapons seeking the Light of the World, the giver of peace. But the day is past, the night has come. Betrayal belongs to this dark night.

Notice that Jesus is the centerpiece of the scene. He comes to meet the delegation from Jerusalem and asks them whom they seek. And Jesus voluntarily gives himself up. The shepherd has gone to meet the wolves—to lay down his life for the sheep. But Peter, who believes he is ready to lay down his life for Jesus, draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. The hour has come and it is night. Violence belongs to this dark night.

It is a cold and dark night and as Jesus stands accused before the high priest, Peter stands with the servants and officials. And in that fellowship—amongst the foe—Peter denies Jesus three times. Denial belongs to this dark night.

At his civil trial we see Pilate's fear as he must execute judgment. When he cannot find a basis on which to condemn Jesus he presents him to the Jews and declares him innocent. The cries of the Jews "Crucify! Crucify" intensify his fear and he hands Jesus over to be crucified. Rejection, injustice and fear belong to this dark night.

John's account of Jesus' death is brief. He is nailed to the cross and nearby is a lonely little scene. Mary the mother of Jesus stands with some women and the beloved disciple, to whom he entrusts his mother. Some time later Jesus thirsts and then he declares "It is finished," and he dies. A soldier pierces his side, bringing a flow of blood and water. The Bread of Life, whose flesh is now broken, gives his body and blood that those who eat and drink may live. Water and blood, life and cleansing for the world, flow from his riven side. Glory also belongs to this dark night.

And in the night of fear and death John writes tenderly about the burial of Jesus. There was a garden near by in which there was a new tomb. Nicodemus provided about 75 pounds of spices and they wrapped his body in strips of linen. There, in the tomb they laid the body of Jesus. Death belongs to this dark night.

Even though today we are still in the dark night of this holy hour, we, as readers of John's Gospel, and people of the resurrected Lord know that this hour ends with the break of day. Without that knowledge we would truly find this long night terrifying. We are children of light who no longer dwell in dark places of fear, hatred, rejection, injustice, betrayal, denial and death. Just to pass through it, as Jesus did, awaiting glory brings an unspeakable gratitude for the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior who calls us into the fellowship of his glorious light that we might be children of the day, victorious over death and darkness, no longer terrorized by the night.