

Title: The Secret Is Out

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we give you thanks for all that Jesus did for us, to bring you and us closer; may we be ever grateful and live in gratitude for the gift of your love, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I have written many Palm Sunday sermons. The challenge for me and every preacher on this day is the text. The story is so powerful that anything I can say would seem meager by comparison. The story is also so big that a sermon covering it would be really, really long. I only focused on a few verses each year. I like Karen's choice of offering a commentary rather than a formal sermon.

In all four gospels, the passion is the biggest section of those gospels. Everything prior to Jesus' entry in Jerusalem is building up to that one week of Jesus' life. The gospel writers rightly believe that this story is the one that will entice people to convert to Christianity.

The irony is that this is also a story of someone convicted of treason and executed. There are a few weird people who follow convicts in our prisons and even a few women who marry convicts, but I know of no one who follows a convict and an executed one at that, although Charlie Mason is a weird case. Manson wasn't executed, but he did die in prison. The job of the prelude to the passion is to say that Jesus is someone much more than an executed criminal. Jesus is a righteous person who preaches love.

The prelude also describes why the religious authorities believe Jesus to be a big enough threat that Jesus must die. In their minds, Judaism cannot accept a dissenting voice. Certainly, not a voice that is not theirs and certainly not someone who claims divinity.

The original plan is to murder Jesus after the Passover, but an insider gives them an opportunity to act while Jesus is in or near the city. Judas seemed to have compassion for the poor and that may be why he followed Jesus. Or perhaps, Judas was hoping for an armed revolt against the Romans. In either case, Judas was disappointed, which may have festered into anger. We really don't know what set him off.

This was a poor collection of followers. One betrayed him. One denied him. The rest ran for their lives and hid. Yoda might say, "Self-preservation, strong in they are."

What's believed to be Caiaphas' house was discovered and excavated. The basement has a few jail cells. There is a hole in the floor that goes down two levels to the cells. As a demonstration, a guide will turn off the lights and there is total darkness. The reason for the hole was the practice of taking a prisoner, hanging them by their feet down the hole and keeping them there in the darkness. This was likely done to Jesus.

I have previously mentioned the messianic secret in Mark. During Jesus' trial, the high priest confronted Jesus to tell them if Jesus was the messiah or not. Jesus breaks his public silence on who he is by saying, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" (Mark 14:62b)

When God called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, Moses gave several excuses that were to convince God that God got the wrong person. Moses finally asked, "Who should I tell them sent me?" God replied, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14b)

The high priest knew exactly what Jesus was saying. Jesus is the I AM. Jesus is divine. Jesus quotes Daniel about the coming of the Son of Man. The penalty for blasphemy was death.

The religious authorities cannot execute Jesus. The city is still full of people for the Passover. If they killed Jesus, the riots would provoke the Romans with a massive military response. That could jeopardize their position of power. It is likely that the high priests had already conspired or at least told the Roman governor, Pilate, about a revolutionary claiming to be King of the Jews. Only Rome gets to say who and who are not kings.

Mark lets Pilate off the hook for the responsibility of Jesus' execution. Mark says, "For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over." (Mark 15:10) If Pilate truly thought this was a sham trial, Jesus would not have been crucified. Pilate might have beheaded Jesus to pacify the high priests, but crucifixion was reserved for treason. Pilate must have been convinced that Jesus was guilty of treason against Rome.

Why would Mark paint Pilate in a good light? Well, Pilate was the governor and Pilate represented the emperor in Palestine. To say that Pilate had Jesus crucified purposely and for treason might dissuade people reading his gospel to convert. This is a state execution and criticizing the state and being in possession of documents criticizing the state would cause an arrest. For the purposes of evangelism, Pilate is a good guy.

In Mark, the only person to call Jesus the Son of God is a gentile Roman soldier. The messianic secret is said out loud by a non-Jew. The person who was in charge of Jesus' execution recognized the Son of God. This is the point of the gospel and of the passion story, to recognize that Jesus is who he said he was.

This is the highlight of Mark's gospel. Mark wasn't big on Easter. Easter was an afterthought. In Luke and John, the climax of the story is the resurrection and to a lesser extent Matthew. Not so with Mark. The Son of God died on a Roman cross.

We know this all happened on a Friday, because the Sabbath is on a Saturday and the bodies had to be down in order to comply with the Law of Moses.

While the men were all in hiding, it was the women who offered a ministry of presence during the crucifixion and to note where Jesus was buried. The men may have assumed that they would be arrested. The women were steadfast and careful not to bring undue attention to themselves.

When human beings assume power, the result is usually not good for those effected by that power. When people assume power, they have a great deal of difficulty letting go of that power. Mark provides the conundrum of how someone with little power addresses a society where power is pervasive.

Mark is doing this in a context of convincing the people living under this power to convert. Mark wants Christianity to be seen as not a threat to an empire that Christianity will eventually conquer but who also executed the founder as a criminal. There are examples here of how we may speak to power.

Text: **Mark 14:1–15:47** (NRSV)

14 It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus^a by stealth and kill him; ² for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,^b as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,^c and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news^d is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may

^a Gk *him#*

^b The terms *leper* and *leprosy* can refer to several diseases

^c The denarius was the usual day’s wage for a laborer

^d Or *gospel*

eat the Passover with my disciples?’¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”¹⁶ So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷ When it was evening, he came with the twelve.¹⁸ And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?”²⁰ He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread^c into the bowl^f with me.²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.”²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.²⁴ He said to them, “This is my blood of the^g covenant, which is poured out for many.²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.²⁷ And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written,

‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”²⁹ Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.”³⁰ Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.”³¹ But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same.

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated.³⁴ And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.”³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.³⁶ He said, “Abba,^h Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?³⁸ Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;ⁱ the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.⁴⁰ And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.⁴¹ He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴² Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

^c Gk lacks *bread*

^f Other ancient authorities read *same bowl*

^g Other ancient authorities add *new*

^h Aramaic for *Father*

ⁱ Or *into temptation*

⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ 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.” ⁴⁵ So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷ But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ All of them deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵² but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴ Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶ For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷ Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸ “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’ ” ⁵⁹ But even on this point their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” ⁶¹ But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah,^j the Son of the Blessed One?” ⁶² Jesus said, “I am; and

‘you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of the Power,’
and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’ ”

⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death. ⁶⁵ Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” The guards also took him over and beat him.

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out into the forecourt.^k Then the cock crowed.^l ⁶⁹ And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.”

⁷¹ But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” ⁷² At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

^j Or *the Christ*

^k Or *gateway*

^l Other ancient authorities lack *Then the cock crowed*

15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.” ³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.” ⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷ Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸ So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹ Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” ¹⁰ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹² Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do^a with the man you call^b the King of the Jews?” ¹³ They shouted back, “Crucify him!” ¹⁴ Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters^c); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²² Then they brought Jesus^d to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵ It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” ²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.^e ²⁹ Those who passed by derided^f him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Messiah,^g the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

^a Other ancient authorities read *what should I do*

^b Other ancient authorities lack *the man you call*

^c Gk *the praetorium*

^d Gk *him*

^e Other ancient authorities add verse 28, *And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “And he was counted among the lawless.”*

^f Or *blasphemed*

^g Or *the Christ*

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land^h until three in the afternoon.
³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"ⁱ ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he^j breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"^k
⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.
⁴² When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ Then Joseph^l bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body,^m wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the bodyⁿ was laid.

^h Or *earth*

ⁱ Other ancient authorities read *made me a reproach*

^j Other ancient authorities add *cried out and*

^k Or *a son of God*

^l Gk *he*

^m Gk *it*

ⁿ Gk *it*

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Mk 14:1–15:47). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.