

# “Mt. Olivet”

Normally, on Maundy Thursday we focus on the events of the Upper Room – as Jesus shares His body and blood with the disciples for the first time, just as He had foreshadowed when He told them, “My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. And unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you” (Jn. 6).

However, tonight, as we continue our journey through the mountains of the Bible, we find ourselves on Mt. Olivet – the Mount of Olives. After Jesus and the disciples have eaten the Passover meal and Jesus elevated the meaning of that meal with the establishment of a new and better covenant, Jesus and the 11 (as Judas has already left to betray Him) they leave and go to the Garden of Gethsemane, which is on the Mount of Olives.

This is a familiar place, which is why Judas knew where to go. Jesus would often meet there with His disciples. It is from Mt. Olivet that Jesus and the disciples are looking at the “magnificent buildings” of the Temple and Jesus tells them that not one stone will be left upon another, and the disciples ask Him, “When will these things happen?” And Jesus tells them that it is not for them to know. Only the Father knows when He will bring this to be.

It is from Jerusalem that Jesus and all the people can look across the Kidron Valley and see the many tombs sitting on Mt. Olivet. Since before Jesus' day, Mt. Olivet has been "the" place to be buried. Before Passover week, the people would whitewash the sepulchers to clean them up. Jesus takes the opportunity and compares the Pharisees and teachers of the Law to these tombs which are clean and beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are filled with dead men's bones.

It is from Mt. Olivet that Jesus will ascend into heaven – promising to return in the same way some day.

It is traditionally believed that it is on the Mount of Olives that Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer. The "Pater Noster" church is there commemorating the event. That is where we were in 2011 when the young Palestinian men were throwing sizable rocks at cars and people, and the police had to come to deal with the incident.

For tonight, as it is Maundy Thursday, we will turn our attention to a different group of men who came to the Mount of Olives with bad intentions. After three hours of sorrowful prayer knowing the will of His Father and the cup of suffering which is being placed before Him, Jesus is confronted by a crowd led by Judas. The crowd of soldiers who are in allegiance with the chief priests and elders come with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus.

There are many details about this chaotic interaction which are recorded in the four gospels. For me, the most interesting, and the most impactful is a detail

we only hear in John's Gospel about the crowd who came to arrest Jesus – and we will read the full account of this tomorrow night as we read the Passion from the Gospel of John.

There at the Garden of Gethsemane on Mount Olivet, John records that Jesus asks the soldiers, "Whom do you seek?" They respond, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus says, "I am he." And when He says this, those who asked drew back and fell to the ground. And they ask again, and he answers the same way again.

You don't get the impact of this in the English. Jesus' answer in the Greek is "Ego eimi" which is simply I AM. When He spoke to the crowd of soldiers, He would have said it in Aramaic and it would be "Yahweh" – the personal Name of God. This is the obvious part of the reason they draw back. So they ask again, and Jesus answers with the same Name, but this time gives instruction to the crowd of soldiers to let the disciples go.

And even after Peter pulls a typical Peter move and cuts off Malchus' ear, they don't arrest Peter. They don't even arrest him when he shows up for the trial at Caiaphas' house. John tells us that this was a fulfillment of prophecy that "of those whom You gave Me, I have lost not one." With all of the seemingly chaotic events which happened that night on Mount Olivet, one thing was certain – Jesus was in charge. He was in total control of the situation.

This is what He was talking about earlier in John's Gospel when He says, "I am the Good Shepherd . . . The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it

down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” (Jn. 10).

The disciples see Jesus leave Mount Olivet in the custody of a band of evil men in the hour of darkness. They scatter and run and hide. Only Peter and John follow, yet John remains silent and Peter wishes he did.

Mount Olivet is the last mountain before the last mountain. We see the controlled chaos of Jesus being arrested. When all the world seems out of control and that God is losing the battle to those who oppose Him, know that God is in control. What happened that day was all part of God’s plan to rescue you from sin, death, and the devil. We still live in a chaotic world which fights against God and seems like the world is winning.

Yet, Christ’s suffering and death has led to life. And just like with Christ’s prediction spoken on Mount Olivet that there will come a day that not one stone will be left on top of another in Jerusalem, we don’t have to worry about that day, because that day, like every day, is part of God’s plan to save you.

And as He promised the day He ascended into heaven from Mount Olivet, He will return and usher in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Mount Olivet stands as a testimony that our confidence in God is certain and that His will is being and will continue to be done even as this chaotic fallen world fights against Him in utter futility. His victory is complete. As we will hear Him say tomorrow night on the last mountain, “It is finished.” Amen.