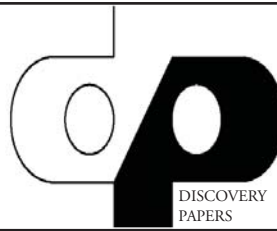


# A GLIMMER OF HOPE

**SERIES: THE WAY OF THE LORD: FOLLOWING JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK**



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Mark 14:43-52  
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In 1985, Charlie Wedemeyer, the Los Gatos High School football coach who suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig Disease), hovered between life and death. He couldn't even keep down a spoonful of soup, and he was losing weight quickly. "I could feel myself weakening, going," Wedemeyer said. Then a nurse asked him if he wanted to pray. Though not spiritually inclined, Wedemeyer consented. As the nurse placed a hand on him and prayed, he felt a surge of power and peace course through his body. His throat cleared, and for the first time in months, he drank soup without choking. In fact, he drank two bowls in five minutes. His wife, Lucy, said, "It was an absolute miracle. It was as if someone was standing right next to him, saying, 'Just trust in me and everything will be okay.'"

And this: near the bed was an amaryllis plant, a gift from another coach. It had been there for a week, but its flowers remained tightly closed. After the nurse prayed, the flower was in full bloom. "I believe in miracles," Wedemeyer said. "I became a Christian."

For the next twenty-five years, up until Charlie's death in June, the Wedemeyers toured the world with their powerful message of faith in Christ. Charlie couldn't speak, or even eat or breathe without life support, but he could smile and wink. His radiant presence communicated hope, and Lucy would translate for him. It all started with a prayer, punctuated by the blooming of a flower, a glimmer of hope: a portend, perhaps, of things to come.<sup>1</sup>

God gives us glimmers of hope when we need them. They appear in all sorts of ways. In Gethsemane, when the darkness was closing in on Jesus and his disciples, a glimmer of hope appeared in the form of a streaker. Yes, a streaker.

In Gethsemane, just east of Jerusalem, Jesus prayed to the Father, asking that the cup of suffering be taken from him. He nevertheless submitted to the Father's will and rose to meet those who were coming to arrest him. He then spoke to his sleepy disciples, urging them to get up. The narrative resumes in Mark 14:43.

## The kiss of a friend

Mark 14:43-47:

<sup>43</sup>**Immediately while He was still speaking,**

**Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. <sup>44</sup>Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard." <sup>45</sup>After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, "Rabbi!" and kissed Him. <sup>46</sup>They laid hands on Him and seized Him. <sup>47</sup>But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.<sup>2</sup>**

When Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples earlier in the evening, he announced that one of his disciples would betray him. Mark had earlier identified the betrayer as Judas Iscariot, who offered his services to the Jewish leaders (Mark 14:10-11, 18). Now, Judas leads a detachment from the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish council, to Jesus in Gethsemane.<sup>3</sup> Mark, by identifying Judas as "one of the twelve," emphasizes his treachery: the betrayer is one of Jesus' closest friends. The traitor, with a well-armed detachment of Jesus' enemies, emerges from the darkness.

Judas has made arrangements to ensure an effective seizure. The detachment from the Sanhedrin has been commissioned to arrest Jesus, but they may not be familiar enough with him to recognize him, especially in the dark. Therefore, Judas has told them to seize the one whom he kisses. A kiss would be a standard greeting for friends, especially for greetings between a rabbi and his disciple. Judas, though, transforms a sign of friendship into a sign of betrayal. For Judas, a kiss was an effective means of fingering Jesus. For Jesus, it must have been a stake in his heart. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, / But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy" (Proverbs 27:6).

Immediately after Jesus felt the lips of his friend, he feels the hands of his enemies: the detachment arrests him. Where is God, whom Jesus addressed in Gethsemane with intimacy and trust as "Abba," who promised to hold his Servant "by the hand" (Isaiah 42:6)?

A bystander, whom Mark doesn't identify, rises to Jesus' defense and cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave. John identifies him not as a bystander but as Peter, one of Jesus' disciples (John 18:10). Mark declines to identify him as a disciple, possibly because he's not acting like a disciple.

In any case, whoever attacked the slave wasn't following Jesus, who said that anyone who wanted to follow him must not take up his sword but his cross (Mark 8:34). The bystander wasn't following Jesus' instructions in Gethsemane to watch and pray: to stay spiritually alert and bring what he saw to God in prayer. Instead, he was capitulating to temptation, to zeal without knowledge (Mark 14:38).

## The temptation to fight

We will on occasion find ourselves in places that resemble Gethsemane. After all, Jesus led his disciples to Gethsemane. Perhaps friends or co-workers or romantic interests turn into enemies, betrayers, or backstabbers, maybe even bringing with them a powerful detachment of critics. Whatever takes place in your Gethsemane, it feels as if the darkness is closing in. At such a time, you may have cause to wonder: Where is God? Didn't he promise to be with you, to never leave you or forsake you, even to hold you by the hand?

If someone or some people are responsible for your predicament, you may want to draw a sword, so to speak: to fight back, to lash out in anger. If no one is apparently responsible, well, someone must be responsible, so you may want to lash out at someone, perhaps anyone, to satisfy your anger. When you strike with your sword, though, you usually leave behind a bloody mess. In Gethsemane, you're tempted to unite your personal cause with the cause of Christ and see them as one and the same. If you succumb to this temptation, you often act in zeal but not with knowledge. And if you overreact, well, the ends justify the means, don't they?

Stan Mikita, a former professional hockey player, used to get into a lot of fights during games until one day his eight-year-old daughter asked him, "How can you score goals when you're always in the penalty box, Daddy?"<sup>4</sup> When we lash out in anger, we do so at the expense of greater goals.

The church's history, with the "Gethsemanes" it has found itself in, is not an altogether laudable one. Far too often, it has responded like the anonymous disciple in Mark's account, taking up arms, either literally or figuratively, against its enemies. When the church takes up the weapons of the world, instead of the weapons of the Spirit, it sacrifices its witness. For 200 years, from the end of the eleventh century to the end of the thirteenth century, the church sent Crusaders to the Holy Land. The witness of the church is still reeling, especially in the Middle East. Church historian Bruce Shelley observes,

*Unfortunately the popes never held two basic truths which we must never forget: Christianity's highest satisfactions are not guaranteed by possession of special*

*places, and the sword is never God's way to extend Christ's church.*<sup>5</sup>

When you find yourself in Gethsemane, you may be tempted to fight. You may also face another temptation, one that all the disciples succumbed to. You may be tempted to run.

## To fulfill the Scriptures

Mark 14:48-50:

**<sup>48</sup>And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber? <sup>49</sup>Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures." <sup>50</sup>And they all left Him and fled.**

Jesus, in so many words, says to the detachment that has come to arrest him, "Isn't this a bit much?" Just as a kiss was a strange way to identify a suspect, swords and clubs are strange implements to bring against someone who has showed no inclination toward violence. It would be one thing if he were an insurrectionist, as many hoped he would be, but he has had nothing to do with violent nationalism.<sup>6</sup> Yes, Jesus is a revolutionary, but he's advocating cross-bearing love, not sword-wielding violence. For Jesus, the kingdom of God features the way of the cross, the way of the Suffering Servant, and the way of self-giving love. He is, in fact, bringing in the kingdom by neither fighting his enemies nor running from them. Strengthened by prayer, he submits to the will of God.

In noting the timing (night) and location (away from the city) of his arrest, Jesus unmasks the schemes of his enemies. They could have easily seized Jesus during the day, when he was teaching publicly in the temple. However, they wanted nothing to do with seizing him openly, because they were afraid that doing so might provoke a riot (Mark 14:1-2). The Sanhedrin preferred to do its dirty work at night, away from public view.

Despite their clandestine ways, Jesus' enemies haven't taken him by surprise. The guards snuck up on him, but he knew they were coming. He knew the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, that the Son of Man would be betrayed, just as it was written of him (Mark 14:21). Unlike his disciples, Jesus has been watching and praying. His enemies think they own the night, but even the night is under the purview of God, the author of the Scriptures, who is Light (1 John 1:5). As they lay hands on Jesus, the biblical story rushes toward its climax. Unbeknownst to them, they arrested Jesus "to fulfill the Scriptures."

The disciples need to hear, one more time, especially

now, as everything turns against their master, that the Scriptures are being fulfilled. Alas, they don't understand Jesus. They have never really understood the mission of Jesus. They "all" pledged allegiance, then fell asleep in Gethsemane. They "all" said that they would die with Jesus (Mark 14:31). Instead, they "all" left him and fled.

### The temptation to run

Like the disciples, we usually start out misunderstanding the mission of Jesus and what he asks of us. If we choose to follow him, we may pledge allegiance to him without understanding that he beckons us to share his sufferings in order to bring his healing, loving rule to the world. Again—and often—we're guilty of zeal without knowledge, which is fine, maybe even unavoidable, as long as we're open to having our minds renewed.

You might wonder, when the darkness closes in, isn't this a bit much? Do you really deserve this? As Clint Eastwood's character says in the movie *Unforgiven*, "Deserve's got nothing to do with it."<sup>7</sup> If we know the Scriptures, though, the darkness won't sneak up on us. All that Gethsemane represents—betrayal, oppression, persecution—is completely consistent with the biblical story. You can even say, therefore, that your own Gethsemane fulfills the Scriptures. Just like the disciples, we need to hear, as we stare down the forces of evil, that the Scriptures foretold our participation in the sufferings of Christ (John 15:20, Philippians 3:10, 2 Timothy 3:12).

In Gethsemane, if you're not tempted to fight, you'll probably be tempted to run. When Jesus was seized, not just one disciple but all his disciples ran. We run because we'd rather not face challenges, rather not face questions without the answers, rather not face the expectations that come with responsibility. When life gets hard, instead of facing into the chaos, we run from it. Instead of clinging to Jesus, we run from him, fearing that he can't be trusted. We retreat from the arena of real life, often to the refuge of an active fantasy life.

Harry Chapin, as the character in one of his songs, sings of the things he once did: he played the trumpet and the guitar, he raised a flag at dawn, he sang hymns. But he stopped doing all those things. He tossed everything "up on the shelf." Throughout the song, though, he wonders, "Could there ever be something else?" Toward the end of the song, he realizes that it's not so much the things he's kept on the shelf, but himself: "Well I've hidden there up on the shelf." A chorus of voices concludes: "You've lived yourself a good life but a blind one."<sup>8</sup> He withdrew from the arena of real life.

The church, though it has erred by fighting evil with the weapons of the world, has also erred by retreating from the

world. In the stated interest of purity, but in reality motivated by fear, the church has often sacrificed its mission to the world, which is thereby deprived of God's healing, loving rule. When we withdraw from the public square, we deprive it of what needs: the words, works, and justice of God. If we withdraw to cultivate a private spirituality and leave the world to its rulers, we should not then be surprised by the decisions they make. The monastic movement of the fourth and fifth centuries, though infinitely more positive in its influence than the Crusades, was in essence unnatural, Shelly says.

*"To enter a monastery was to separate from the world, to abandon the ordinary relationships of social life, to shun marriage and all that the Christian home signifies. And supporting the whole endeavor was an erroneous view of man. The soul, said the monk, is chained to the flesh as a prisoner to a corpse. That is not the biblical view of human life and it created a fundamental flaw in monasticism."*<sup>9</sup>

So, we run. Or we fight. Or we do both. We run, but when we get tired of running, we fight: we're passive-aggressive. Or, like the disciple in Mark's account, we fight, but when we fail, we run: we're aggressive-passive. Is there another way? Yes. It's the way of the Lord. In the way of the Lord, you come alive, because Jesus said you will save your life if you lose it for his sake and for the sake of the gospel. In the way of the Lord, you fight, but you fight against spiritual forces of wickedness and you employ weapons of the Spirit: truth, love, and prayer. To walk in the way of the Lord can feel as if you're walking on the edge of a knife. It's the seemingly impossible middle road. Can we walk in it? Let's see.

### The man who lost his linen

Mark 14:51-52:

**<sup>51</sup>A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. <sup>52</sup>But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.**

All the disciples, who pledged to follow Jesus, abandoned him. Mark, however, takes note of a young man who was following Jesus even after the detachment laid hands on him. For Mark's purposes, the man's name is unimportant. Curiously, however, his clothing merits consideration. For reasons undisclosed, the young man was wearing nothing but a linen sheet. The detachment that seized Jesus also seizes the young man, evidently because he had aligned himself with Jesus. He frees himself, however, leaving the linen sheet in the hands of his would-be captors.

Mark alone among the gospel writers includes this story.



A curious story it is. The young man, barely clothed, appears out of nowhere and disappears naked into the night. In the middle of an intense narrative, the story almost comes as comic relief. For readers, a question emerges: What's this story doing here?

First, the story emphasizes the isolation of Jesus. All his disciples fled, and someone who wanted to follow him only shared his fate for a moment before also running away. Earlier, a blind man threw aside his garment to meet Jesus (Mark 10:50). Now, a young man leaves behind his garment to run from him. Everyone abandoned Jesus. No one would stand with him when he stood before his enemies. Where he goes, no one follows.

Still, the tantalizing details of the story makes us crave an additional reason for its inclusion. If we let the story hang in our minds as we read on, we will be reminded of it when we come to the end of the gospel. Further on, Mark reports that Jesus, after he was executed, was wrapped in a "linen cloth" and laid in a tomb (Mark 15:46). When three women came to the tomb, the large stone that covered the tomb, amazingly, had been rolled away. Mark tells the story: "Entering the tomb, they saw a young man at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid him'" (Mark 16:5-6).

The mysterious "young man" who appeared, out of nowhere, in Gethsemane escaped. Another mysterious "young man" appeared, out of nowhere, in a tomb to announce that the one who had been placed there was, in fact, no longer there. The young man in linen left Gethsemane. Another man, also dressed in linen, left his tomb. Mark's story of the young man in Gethsemane, then, anticipates the climax of his entire narrative. It foreshadows the resurrection, which will overturn the arrest in Gethsemane, the condemnation of the Sanhedrin, and the verdict of Pilate. It anticipates the victory of God. The curious story of the young man who lost his linen sparks a glimmer of hope in the darkness of Gethsemane. Alas, the disciples weren't there to see it.

The brief story in verses 51-52 functions like a scene in a movie that at first seems out of place. As the movie continues, you might forget about the scene. But later, another scene reminds you of the earlier scene and makes sense of it.

### **What to watch for**

How do you walk in the way of the Lord? In Gethsemane, Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray. One of the things to watch for in Gethsemane is a sign of hope,

which often appears in the form of an intrusion of sorts: an anomaly, something that looks as if it doesn't quite belong. A watchful reader of the Gospel of Mark asks, when coming to the curious story of the man who lost his linen, "What's that doing here?" A watchful follower of Jesus asks, when she finds herself in a place like Gethsemane and notices a curious intrusion, "What's that about?" In the case of the man who lost his linen, it was a sign of hope. In the case of many of the odd intrusions into our stories, they're signs of hope.

The Scriptures promise God's victory over all that is evil, all that is wrong, all that is imperfect. The challenge of faith is to believe that promise. The special challenge of faith is to believe that promise when you find yourself in a place like Gethsemane, where darkness closes in. At such times, we not only need to believe, we also need help to believe. Perhaps, at times, we need a sign of sorts, something that reassures us that the story doesn't end in a place like Gethsemane or Golgotha, something that anticipates the victory of God. At such times, if we need a sign, God gives it to us: a glimmer of hope in the darkness. The world needs glimmers of hope and people with eyes to see them. Coming from another world, glimmers of hope let us know that the other world, the kingdom of God, has pierced this world in advance of the day when it will take over this world for the sake of righteousness. A glimmer of hope doesn't necessarily tell you what to do; it tells you what to believe. It tells you to hope.

If you fight, you'll be too preoccupied to see it. If you run, you won't be there to see it. If you watch and pray, God will sustain you, oftentimes with a heavenly glimmer of hope.

### **The last days**

Don't fight. Don't flee. Instead, watch and pray so that you may not come into temptation—the temptation to fight or flee. Watch for what? Watch for what God is doing, especially for the glimmers of hope he shines into the darkness, which assure you that way of the Lord leads to a good place.

Twenty years ago, my mother was dying of cancer. When she went into the hospital for the last time, at first I was afraid of visiting her. I feared showing up at the hospital one day and having someone tell me that she had already died. Worse, I feared being there when she died. I wanted to run, but I knew I needed to stay.

Strange things began happening, though: odd intrusions into the story of my mother's last days. Glimmers of hope. I drew strength from these, and I began to know instantly what to do at every moment: what my mother needed, what our family needed. I set up a vigil to be sure

that people who loved my mother were with her in her hospital room twenty-four hours a day. At first, I feared the hospital. In the end, I wanted to be there. To this day, I have never felt so much like an extension of Christ as I did during the last days of my mother's life.

Near the end, it was Easter Sunday. I was at a dinner gathering at the house of some neighbors along with my father and brothers. My mother's best friend, Ingrid, a Catholic, was there. Ingrid told me that when she was visiting my mother, she carried with her rosary beads but tried to keep my mother from seeing them. Earlier in the day, however, my mother happened to see them and told Ingrid, "I like them." For me, when Ingrid shared that with me, it was a sign, an intrusion in the story: a glimmer of hope. At the beginning, when my mother went to the hospital, I tried to speak to her of Jesus, but she was resistant. When Ingrid visited her on Easter Sunday, though, she responded to the rosary beads. Again, I knew what to do. I bolted from the dinner party and went to the hospital. Unlike Charlie Wedemeyer, there would be no last-minute reprieve for my mother. But there was this:

When I arrived at my mother's hospital room, I took her hand and told her, "Mom, I want you to know that if you want to go to be with Jesus, you can. Do you understand that?" She couldn't speak anymore, but she nodded. "Mom, I can't imagine loving anyone as much as I love you, but as much as I love you, I believe that Jesus loves you even more. Do you believe that?" She nodded. I said, "I don't know very much about heaven, but I do know that Jesus promises to wipe away every tear. 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me, O God.' You recognize that, don't you, Mom? Psalm 23." She nodded. When I thought there were no tears left to cry, tears of joy trickled down her face. When I thought there was no strength left in her arms, she reached out with both hands, pulling me to her. I said, "Mom, you are so wonderful. You raised me so well. You have given me so much. Even now, you are giving to me."

I left the hospital that night. When I returned in the morning, my mother died in my arms.

Glimmers of hope: they appear in the form of a blooming flower by a bed, a nod to rosary beads in a hospital room, and even a streaker in the garden. Watch for them, and walk in the way of the Lord.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Kiefer, "Charlie Wedemeyer Showed Us How to Live," San Jose Mercury News (December 2, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>Literary structure:

A Judas came up with crowd (43)

B Strange sign: a kiss (44-45)

X One drew a sword, cut off ear of the slave of the high priest (47)

B' Strange seizure: with swords and clubs (48-49)

A' They all fled; young man fled (50-52)

<sup>3</sup>Mark, without saying so explicitly, would have us believe that Judas left the group during or immediately after the Passover meal in Jerusalem earlier in the night. John tells us that Judas discerned that Jesus may have retreated to Gethsemane because he often met with his disciples there (John 18:2). The chief priests, scribes, and elders described here make up the Sanhedrin (Mark 8:31).

<sup>4</sup>*Bits & Pieces* (Ragan Communications, 1990), 19.

<sup>5</sup>Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1982), 210.

<sup>6</sup>The word translated "robber" (*lestēs*) would be better translated "insurrectionist" or "brigand." Barabbas, an insurrectionist, is identified as a *lestēs* (Mark 15:7, John 18:40).

<sup>7</sup>*Unforgiven* (Warner Brothers), 1992.

<sup>8</sup>Harry Chapin, *Up on a Shelf* (Cherry Lane Music).

<sup>9</sup>Shelley, 138.