

THE FIRST 15

Monday, May 13, 2024

Today is Monday, May 13 and we are studying the Gospel of John chapter eighteen.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and Loving God, in the morning I lift my heart to praise you. I pause at the beginning of this upcoming day to seek your presence and put you first. Thank you for always being with me and reminding me that you are working all things together for my good. Help me still my scattered thoughts, calm my breath and focus on your loving kindness. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." John 18:1-8

REFLECTION

The section of John's Gospel we study this week recounts the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' earthly life. Jesus' final day has arrived. This is where the end begins. It is the night of the Passover. The night the Passover Lamb is killed and the story of the Exodus is told during the meal. The night we remember how God delivered his people out of slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. Following the Last Supper and the washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus shared his final words in what is called the Farewell Discourse (John 14-17). Jesus concluded with a prayer. He prayed to be glorified, prayed for his disciples and prayed for all believers out into the future for all time (including you and me).

John 18:1 begins, "When he had finished praying." This is when the events kick into motion. You get the sense that Jesus is very much in control of what is about to happen. He does not appear the victim, but one going willingly and decisively to their planned fate. It is nighttime. He leaves the Upper Room with his disciples and walks out into the city. It was the Passover Festival. Jerusalem would have been teeming with people, pilgrims from faraway places who traveled in for the festival. Jesus and his disciples would have passed homes with open windows revealing candlelit gatherings. People would have been joyfully celebrating the Passover with friends and loved ones.

Jesus and the disciples exit the city walls and cross the Kidron Valley. They journey together about one mile to the northeast. Their trek would have taken them down into the valley and up the Mount of Olives passing close to the looming walls of the great Temple. The garden was a place Judas would have known because he had gone there before with Jesus and the disciples. Judas leads a detachment of men coming to arrest Jesus - a combined force of Roman and Jewish officials. The elements of darkness unite. Roman soldiers, Temple officers, led by Judas Iscariot the betrayer. In the blackness of night, they carry lanterns, torches and weapons. The forces of darkness combine against the Light of the World.

Ask: What does it mean that Jesus walked willingly into the garden knowing the betrayer would be there and the arrest would happen? What does it mean to know that Jesus went willingly to the cross for my salvation?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for your loving willingness to lay down your life for the forgiveness of my sin and salvation of my soul. You are the Light of the World, and the darkness of the enemy is no match for your power and love. Help me journey with you to the cross this week, reading the Gospel of John in humble awe, recognizing that the events that occurred so long ago were accomplished for my great good. Amen.