

The Sunday of the Passion
April 9, 2006

Reflection on the Passion According to St Mark by Rev Timothy A Leitzke

It asks too many questions, but most pressing of all it asks, “So what? What does any of this mean?” From the outset, St Mark’s Jesus has been God’s way of tearing into this world, tearing open the heavens and pouring into us. In Mark’s Jesus God has been unstoppable. Now the march into the heart of faith has smacked into a big wall with Jesus tacked up like a poster warning us not to try things his way. Yeah, he’s the poster child for total failure. What does any of this *mean*? Does it mean anything?

Friends of Christ, at the end of this chapter our friend is dead, stuffed hastily into a hole before the Sabbath can begin, but Friends of Christ the death he died enables us to be Friends of Christ. Verse after verse in the Gospel of Mark nobody *gets* it. The demons and spirits and gnomes and fairies know who Jesus is, but the people are clueless, and no show of healing power or command over nature or foreknowledge does any good; no people know who Jesus is. It is here at the Temple, God’s house, the heart of the Hebrew faith, the “navel of the earth” as the prophet Ezekiel calls is, that God’s work in Christ is most fully done.

The Temple sat within a large rectangular courtyard called the Court of the Gentiles. Inside of that was the Court of the Women. Inside of that was the Court of Israel—for the men. Inside of that was yard where the altar blazed with fire from the animals sacrificed. The men could see into it, but could not go into it; only priests were allowed. Inside of that was the sanctuary. Inside that innermost

building was a tiny room, accessible only through a massive curtain. It was entered only once a year and only by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. It was God's throne room.

Now Jesus is dead... and immediately the curtain in the temple is ripped from top to bottom. All those rings of defense are rendered useless. All those layers of security are gone. All that work to filter out people and keep things orderly is undone. God has torn the curtain that we use to keep God hidden, and now we get it. God tears the curtain and the Centurion at the foot of the cross suddenly, seemingly as a knee jerk reaction, says of Jesus, "Truly this person was God's son."

The crucified Christ accomplishes what no other miracles or powers or knowledge could. The Crucified Christ reveals God, who loves people, loves us, so much that God will tear down the throne room curtains, tear open the heavens, tear apart any fences that we build between us and God. In Christ God surrenders all the splendor and the glory and becomes one of us so that no distance, no guilt, no Sin lies between us and God. The curtain is torn and God is poured into the Centurion and into you and into me, giving us faith.

What does any of this mean? It means that in that moment of failure, in that moment of finality, God wins anyway. The curtain will never be sewn shut. Sin will not keep God from us. Now, in the cross, we are Friends of Christ. Amen