**TRAVELING WITH JESUS**

**(Matthew 26:1-16)**

 This book I hold in my hand is an incredible book. Not only does it speak truth across the ages, but it does so in colorful language. The Bible employs numerous metaphors to express who we are as God’s people. I sat down this week and sketched out 10 metaphors the Bible uses to communicate who we are as the people of God. There are others, but the following are among the more popular.

 It occurs to me that our hymns and worship songs often utilize these same metaphors. Music and lyrics help to fix in our mind who we really are in relation to our God. Tom is going to help me from the piano as I describe these metaphors from the pulpit.

1. **The Military Metaphor**

 You may think that you volunteered. Actually, you were drafted into God’s service. Jesus is our Commander, and we are His soldiers. We were born into a world at war. The conflict rages about us, and we need to be fit with the armor of God as we fight against spiritual and demonic forces. It is fitting that we sing, “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

1. **The Family Metaphor**

 God is more than our God; He is our Father. We are His children. As our Father, He protects us, and provides for us, and teaches us, and guides us. As His children, we are to obey Him and trust Him. Since we have the same Father, that means we are brothers and sisters. We are, indeed, “Children of the Heavenly King.”

1. **The Agricultural Metaphor**

 Both the Old and New Testaments portray God as the Owner or the Gardener of a vineyard. We are God’s vineyard. He expects us to be fruitful. Jesus taught that our ability to bear fruit is directly related to whether or not we are abiding or remaining in Him.

 Elsewhere we are called God’s field, and we are likened to wheat ready to be harvested. I am reminded of the hymn, “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come.” The second verse reads:

*All the world is God’s own field,*

*Fruit unto His praise to yield;*

*Wheat and tares together sown,*

*Unto joy or sorrow grown.*

1. **The Animal Metaphor**

 Again, both testaments, teach that God is our Shepherd. According to the NT, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the Chief Shepherd. We are His sheep. We tend to stray, but He will find us, feed us, protect us, and surely lead us. We can rightly sing:

*Savior, like a Shepherd lead us,*

*Much we need Thy Tender care;*

*In Thy pleasant pastures feed us,*

*For our use Thy folds prepare.*

 Time doesn’t permit me to fully explain all of the other metaphors. Let me just mention them.

1. **The Marriage Metaphor:** Jesus is the Groom. We, asthe Church, are His Bride.
2. **The Architectural Metaphor:** Jesus is the cornerstone and the foundation; we are God’s temple, God’s building.
3. **The Athletic Metaphor:** We are runners in a race. We compete for the crown.
4. **The Kingdom Metaphor:** Jesus is the King, and we are citizens of His Kingdom.
5. **The Body Metaphor:** Jesus is the Head, and the Church is His body in the world. Each part is important and needs to do its job
6. **The Traveling Metaphor:** We are on a pilgrimage. We are traveling with Jesus. He is our guide. We are on our way home, our eternal home. I think of the hymn lyrics:

*We’re Marching to Zion, Beautiful, beautiful Zion;*

*We’re marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God.*

 It is this traveling metaphor that I want to focus on today. Our text is Matthew 26:1-16. All through our journey through the gospel of Matthew, we have been traveling with Jesus.

* We were with Him in Bethlehem where He was born, and we witnessed the Magi giving Him gifts.
* We joined Him at the Jordan when He was baptized by John.
* We went with Him into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan.
* We sat on the hillside and heard Him deliver His message on the mount.
* We traveled with Him around the Galilee. We saw Him healing the hurting and heard Him speaking to the curious crowds.
* We have walked down dusty roads and up winding mountainsides.
* We cheered with the crowds as the King entered Jerusalem for the last time on that Palm Sunday.
* We listened as He lambasted the Pharisees for their lame hypocrisy, and then as He dismantled the religious leaders when he answered their questions that were meant to discredit Him. He deflected those questions as easily as one flicks away a pesky fly.
* Lately, we have been with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. He has wowed us with warnings and awed us with announcements of what is coming. More importantly, He has strengthened us with the truth He is coming back.

 Now, there are just three chapters left to traverse in our journey with Jesus through the gospel of Matthew, but each chapter is power packed. Chapter 26 is the longest chapter in Matthew. It comes close to being the longest chapter in the NT. This chapter has 75 verses while Luke 1 has 80 verses.

 With the beginning of this chapter, it seems that the speed of Jesus’ journey to the cross increases. The pace picks up. Let’s not fall behind as we journey with Jesus to the cross. Listen as I read the first 16 verses of Matthew 26.

 I have entitled this message, “Traveling with Jesus.” As we accompany Jesus on this final journey, I want you to take note of three things that we will encounter along the way.

1. **WE WILL ENCOUNTER SHOCKING NEWS THAT SOBERS US.**

In v. 2, Jesus tells His disciples something that He has told them before. In fact, this warning has been given on three previous occasions. The first time Jesus foretold His coming death and subsequent resurrection was back in Matthew 16:21. The second time is found in 17:22-23. The third time is 20:18-19. On that occasion, He adds some specifics. The first two times, He says He will be killed, but in Matthew 20, He claims He will be flogged and crucified.

 When we get to Matthew 26, much had happened since Matthew 20. The disciples may have hoped that Jesus was over that and that He wouldn’t bring up such distasteful and discouraging things. Yet, here He is talking about His own crucifixion again, and He is saying that in just a couple of days He is going to be delivered up to the authorities.

 In v. 2, Jesus tells what is going to happen, and in vv. 3-5, Matthew follows that up by telling his reader how it is going to happen and who is behind it.

 Our ears are not unaccustomed to hearing shocking news, and our eyes are not strangers to seeing shocking news. We turn on the TV news. We listen to the reporter; we see the video. Both convey to us the latest tragedy. Unless we know someone, who is personally involved, such reports are a bit remote. We may not feel the full impact.

 It is different when our doctor’s office calls and reports, “The test was positive. It’s cancer.” It’s different when a family member calls in the middle of the night and tells a tearful tale.

 Such news is shocking, and it sobers us. Life is not just a party because at some point the party will end, and you will have to clean up the mess.

 This idea of being sober-minded is used by Paul in several of his letters (1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, and Titus). It is also used by Peter three times in the first epistle that bears his name. Listen to the following verses:

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers (1 Peter 4:7).

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

 The Greek word that is translated as *sober* means, *well-balanced* or *self-controlled.* When I read that word, I think of Johnny Cash’s song, *I Walk the Line.* In his rich, resonant voice, he would sing, “Because you’re mine, I walk the line.”

 That should be true of our relationship with our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, but we might change the lyrics to read, “Because we are His, we walk the line.”

 As you hear disturbing, startling news, remain steady and steadfast. Keep on keeping on in your walk and your witness.

1. **WE WILL ENCOUNTEER BEAUTIFUL ACTS THAT INSPIRE US.**

 In our text, we find a truly, beautiful story. In both Mark and Matthew’s account, the woman remains unnamed. John, however, identifies her as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. What we have here in Matthew is a flashback because John tells us that this happened at a dinner that took place six days before Passover. It happened the night before Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

 Imagine with me the story. A man named Simon throws a party for Jesus. He is called Simon the leper, but he is no longer a leper because if he was, he wouldn’t be hosting a party. I’ll give you one guess as to why he is no longer a leper. At least 15 men are in attendance at the dinner: Simon, the 12 disciples, Lazarus, and Jesus. Whatever women were present, they were not invited to eat with the men.

 In keeping with the culture of the day, there would have been a very low table, and around the table, the men are reclining. Each one is leaning on one elbow and using his free hand to eat.

 While they were eating, about what do you suppose they are talking? I believe Simon tells the tale of how Jesus healed him one day. With a chuckle, Lazarus says, “Well, I can top that. I used to be dead, and Jesus brought me back to life.” He looks at Jesus and says, “I wish you hadn’t by the way; I was doing just fine.” The disciples join in and tell of the many marvelous things they have seen Jesus do and testify as to what He has done for them.

 From the kitchen, Mary is listening intently. Her heart is filling with admiration, gratitude, and love for Jesus. Her home is just around the corner. Suddenly she leaves. She goes to her house and grabs something. She returns. Without a word, she enters where the men are eating. She is not supposed to be there. Silently, she kneels behind Jesus. Every eye, except those of Jesus, are looking at her. She takes this object she has retrieved. It is her most precious and valuable possession she has in this world. It is a small flask or bottle that contains an aromatic ointment. It comes from Nepal or China. It is worth a small fortune equaling what a workman would make in an entire year.

 Quietly, she breaks open this flask or bottle of ointment. She begins to pour out the contents onto Jesus head. With her hands she works the ointment into his hair and rubs it into his scalp, as well as his neck and shoulders.

 John tells us what Matthew and Mark omit. She also anoints his cracked and calloused feet. Using her hair as a towel, she daubs off the excess.

 All conversation has stopped. No one is talking. Everyone is watching. Finally, Judas breaks the silence. He says accusingly, “Why didn’t you sell this expensive ointment and use the money to care for the poor?” Following suit, other disciples join in, piling on.

 Jesus comes to Mary’s defense and puts their complaints to a stop. While He is addressing the disciples, I think He is looking at Mary with tenderness, compassion, and gratitude in His eyes.

 He says something remarkable in v. 12. He reveals what it is that motivated Mary to give such an extravagant gift. Mary has listened to Jesus, truly listened. Apparently, she had a keener insight than these men who would carry on Jesus’ movement after His death and resurrection. She realized that Jesus was going to die, and very soon. Given the death that He was going to die, there might be no opportunity to prepare His body for burial; so, she did what she could with what she had. And what she did was beautiful. Jesus said that is was so beautiful that wherever the gospel was preached, her gift would be remembered and told.

 Here we are in Enid, Oklahoma in 2020, far removed by space and time from the events of that dinner party, and we are telling the tale of what Mary did.

 And what she did should inspire us. What precious possession belongs to you? How can you use that to bless Jesus? Remember what we looked at last week. When we bless the least of Jesus’ brothers, we are blessing Him. That being the case, how can you use what you have to help those who belong to Jesus?

 One of the most precious things each of us have is time. Related to that is our presence because if you are present one place, that means you cannot be present another place. If you will spend your time to be present with someone who is hurting or in need in any way, that might be the most valuable gift you could ever give. Jesus will notice that. Jesus will reward that one day.

 Let Mary’s beautiful act on Jesus’ behalf inspire you to act in a similar way, but instead of a one-time act, let it become a way of life.

 If I asked if you were willing to die for Jesus, many of you would raise your hand. You would be willing to lay down your life for Him and go out in a blaze of glory. I think what Jesus would rather we do is to cash in our life for quarters, so to speak, and then to spend those quarters one-by-one. We speak a kind word to the one who just insulted us. There goes quarter. We give up watching our favorite TV show or sporting event to go help a neighbor. There goes another quarter. We get up 15 minutes early to pray before work. There goes a quarter, a quarter of an hour, literally, every day.

 The best way to give your life to Jesus, may be, not to die for Him, but to live for Him moment by moment.

 As we travel with Jesus, there is one more thing . . .

1. **WE WILL ENCOUNTER UGLY BETRAYAL THAT CONVICTS US.**

 Consider what Judas did (vv. 14-16). The chief priests were looking for a way to get Jesus. Then, Judas shows up and says, “Let’s make a deal.”

 What in the world would make Judas do what Judas did? Some say, “Well, he was just a dirty, rotten, scoundrel!” That may be it, but some take a more nuanced view of Judas. They argue that Judas really did believe in Jesus. He really thought that Jesus was the Messiah, but Judas was unhappy with the way things were playing out. Jesus wasn’t doing the kinds of things that a Messiah should do. They contend that Judas was trying to force Jesus’ hand. By giving Him up, Judas thought Jesus would have to change His strategy and bring about the revolution that Judas and others wanted.

 I don’t think that is the case, but let’s pretend for a moment that Judas actually was trying to do that. If that was Judas motive, it doesn’t make him any less guilty. Instead of letting God use Judas to accomplish God’s will, Judas was trying to use God to accomplish Judas’ will.

 Do you ever try to use God? God is not a lump of clay that you can mold into the image you want God to have. You are the clay that God means to mold into what He wants you to be. We are not to use God; we are to let God use us.

 Here is what I think happened. We know that Judas was greedy. As the treasurer for the disciples, we know that Judas kept the money bag and helped himself to what was there. He was guilty of embezzling.

 I don’t think that Judas betrayed Jesus just to get 30 pieces of silver though. I think Judas looked at what was happening and where he saw things going, and he didn’t want to go down with the ship. Jesus said He was about to die, and Judas believed Him. Unlike Mary who stood with Jesus and gave her all, Judas stepped away from Jesus to protect himself and what He had.

 I think if we were honest, we would have to admit there is a little bit of Judas in all of us. We are tempted to serve God for selfish reasons. We are attracted to the blessings. What will happen when things get tough? What happens when we begin to realize there is a cost to following Jesus?

 Let the story of Judas’ ugly betrayal convict you if you have been serving God out of mercenary motives.

 Last week I finished reading a book on the Revolutionary War. It dealt in part with the betrayal of Benedict Arnold. All the way back in grade school I learned that Benedict Arnold was guilty of treason, but I never knew what he did or why. Arnold was a vain man and a greedy man. He lived an extravagant life and went deeply into debt. He kept looking for a way to come out on top. He was given command of West Point, which at the time was a Continental fort north of New York City. Arnold realized that if the rebels for whom he was fighting won the war, he would have to repay his debts, but if Great Britain won, and he sided with them, he could walk away and live in luxury with his wife in England. He made plans to let the British troops take West Point. The plot was uncovered, and although he escaped, he is the Judas of American history.

 Don’t be a Judas or a Benedict Arnold towards Jesus. Be a Mary. Let your gratitude and love for Jesus overflow in extravagant praise, worship, and service because He loved us in an extravagant way through His death on the cross.

 I began this message in a musical way. I am going to close it with a music video. The song was written by Gloria Gaither. It is sung by Steve Green. It is called, “Broken and Spilled Out.”