

Point Jesus Out
Mark 14:43-46

Sharon, Kaylin, and I were walking the streets of Chicago when we first heard the news. I had been invited to speak at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago and, since school was out for the summer, we had gone as a family. It is always nice when I go to speak in a strange place to look out and see their familiar smiles. Besides, they always laugh at my jokes.

We were looking for a place to eat amidst the crowds on what they call Chicago's Magnificent Mile. All of a sudden we heard these three loud voices, young girls shouting a proclamation of stupendous shock and stirring sorrow that was oddly enough also laced with an undeniably malicious, mocking scorn. It was as if they did not themselves know how they should feel about the stunning news they were broadcasting. "It's Michael Jackson!" they were hollering. "Michael Jackson is dead. Michael Jackson is dead."

Who believes that kind of news when you hear it yelled out of the proverbial blue by teenagers on the street? One could hardly tell from their demeanors, as draped in derision as they were cloaked in concern, whether they were perpetrating some sick joke.

It is for this very reason that I keep my cell phone holstered on my hip the way the cowboys of old latched their six shooters to their sides. You never know when you might need to quick draw that thing. You never know when trouble is coming: the snotty email, the gossipy news alert, the addictive desire for a quick game of solitaire. You have to be ready. Your cell phone has to be ready to open up and get to work at a moment's notice. I get so much email these days I admit to having an itchy trigger finger on my cell phone hand. I'm fast. Real fast. My cell phone comes out so quickly my wife hardly has time to say "put that thing down, we're having dinner." This day, before she could say, "put that thing down, we're having a nice walk," the cell phone was out, I was on the internet, looking at pictures of Michael Jackson and reading a story about him being taken by ambulance from his home, not breathing.

It didn't matter what you thought of the man or his music, by the end of that day and the days that would follow, you were inundated with news about his spectacularly stunning and sad

life and his equally stunning and sad death. And his face was everywhere. Sometimes with his name, sometimes without. But there was no confusion. You knew him. The whole world seemed to know him, know how he lived and how he died.

When Walter Cronkite and Edward Kennedy died a few weeks ago, there was a similar sense of “knowing.” Their lives were less controversial, but their faces were just as recognizable. There are others like them, of course. Among the living and the dead. People who are instantly and globally recognized in life and death. Elvis Presley. John F. Kennedy. Ronald Reagan. Marilyn Monroe. Michael Jordan. Oprah Winfrey. Katie Couric. Doesn’t matter what you think of them. You *know* them. And if they walked into this sanctuary this afternoon, your head would turn with everyone else’s head and you would be able without a moment’s hesitation to *point any one of them out*.

Jesus . . . is . . . *not* like that. We know his name, but we don’t have a face. We have all this data. We’ve got the writings of Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, and so forth. But, if Jesus walked into this sanctuary this morning, presuming he was wearing a twenty-first century suit and not a first-century robe, how would you know who he was? The answer is: you wouldn’t. For all you know, the person sitting right beside you *right now* could be Jesus, and you would not have a clue.

Apparently, it wasn’t so very different in the first century, when Jesus was walking and talking in Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. Even during what appears to us to have been a spectacularly famous and decidedly controversial *public* life of preaching, exorcising, teaching, and healing throughout the regions of Palestine, not all that many people, certainly not the important and powerful people, could stare into a crowd and point Jesus out. Know how I know that? *The Kiss*.

Now, don’t focus too hard on the kiss or you’ll miss the point. That is how it generally has been for me, for most of my life. For me, the stress had always been on that despicable, treacherous, traitorous kiss.

We humans are preoccupied with kissing, aren't we? If you walk down a beautiful pathway, say in a park, and you see gentle waterfalls, and hear the chirping of birds and the laughter of little children, and sense the rustling of leaves at your feet as a gentle wind whirls around you and stirs up all the pieces of creation in your midst, you notice THOSE things. Those beautiful things in God's creation. But if you walk down that same pathway and two people are making out on a bench, kissing and stuff, slobbering all over each other, what grabs your attention? You might smile at youthful indiscretion, or, if the couple is older, wonder if some kind of dementia is involved. But the point is this: kissing kidnaps your attention. When people kiss, other people take notice.

I . . . noticed Judas. Whenever I read this story and whenever I heard it preached, the stress for me was always on Judas' infamous kiss. The scripture says: "The one whom I KISS is the man, arrest him, and take him away."

But, . . . *what if* the stress were not on the kiss but on the HIM? The scripture says: "The one whom I kiss is THE MAN, arrest HIM, and take HIM away." See, HIM is the problem. They know the reputation of HIM. HIS reputation is why they were out to get HIM. What they did not know was what this HIM looked like. Catching HIM therefore had to be an inside job. The authorities needed someone close so they could be sure they got the right man. And *that* is where Judas came in. They needed Judas to point Jesus out.

In her commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Morna Hooker makes the point: "The pre-arranged signal [the kiss] identifies Jesus, which suggests that his captors did not recognize him. In John's account no signal is given and Jesus identifies himself. It is interesting that the evangelists are agreed that Jesus' captors did not know who he was, since it suggests that he was not in fact as well known in Jerusalem as we might imagine from the gospels."¹

Of the historians of the period, who studied him? The answer: nobody. Of the artists of the period, who covered him? The answer: nobody. That, of course, is why we don't know what he looked like. No one ever asked the Son of God to sit for a portrait. So, the historians

1. Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According To Saint Mark* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 351.

didn't cover him. The artists didn't sculpt him. And the temple police could not ID him. Jesus, it turns out, is a lot like you and me. To the powerful people of his time, for too many people in our time, he is just one more anonymous face in the bustling crowd.

Here's the problem. In the first century, the high priests thought Jesus was leading people dangerously astray. But how were they going to stop him if they didn't know what he looked like? Their temple police needed somebody! In the twenty first century, we believe that Jesus is leading the way to heaven. But how are we going to get people to follow him, how are WE going to be able to follow him if we don't know what he looks like? You know what we need? *We need, **the world needs** somebody to point Jesus out! You know what we need? **We need . . . Judas!!!***

I know what you're thinking. ***Judas!?!?*** Are you crazy? ***Judas!?!?***

Amazingly enough, though, ***Judas*** was the ***first*** apostle to do what Jesus commissioned ***all*** the apostles to do. While all Jesus' other followers were getting ready to put as much distance as they could between themselves and their Lord, Judas was about to use a kiss to tether himself to Jesus for all time. Judas made sure that the people who desperately wanted to find Jesus found Jesus. ***Judas pointed Jesus out!!***

Now, it's our turn. To be Judas . . .

Remember picture negatives? Kids today don't know anything. All this digital mess. They snap a shot, they see what it looks like on a lens on the back of the camera instantly. They don't like it, they erase it instantly, they shoot another. When they do like it, seconds later, it's all over the internet, the web, Facebook, twittering around the globe in nanoseconds for the entire population of the planet to see.

In my generation, after we took the pictures, we had to turn the camera this way and that until we discovered this little lever, and then we had to use that lever to crank the film back up into a roll, and then we had to break our way into the camera to get the film, and then we had to drag the film out of the camera. And we had to do it all in the proper sequence, so the film would get rolled up in the proper lack of sunlight so as not to over expose the film. And then,

after all that, we still couldn't look at anything. We had to send the film off somewhere and we had to wait *for days* before we got to see what the pictures looked like. Seems like I was just rejoicing about the *miracle* of one hour photo processing when this whole digital thing crops up and turns the world upside down. That's what I'm talking about, turning the world upside down. Remember those little negatives, the strips, we'd get back with the processed pictures. The negatives were the reverse images of the things we saw in the actual photo, but they were the same photo, just in negative, just in dark reverse. Judas is the dark reverse of what we should be. Like Judas, ***WE SHOULD BE POINTING JESUS OUT!!!*** Because, unless we do, the world won't know to run to HIM. Remember how when Bartimaeus was on the road side crying out to Jesus in Mark 10. The disciples should have pointed Jesus out. Over here, Bartimaeus, here he is. But they tried to hide Jesus, tried to shut up Bartimaeus. Instead of pointing Jesus out, they tried to secret Jesus away. Remember the stories about the little children that people were bringing to Jesus. Jesus, the King James Version tells us, *suffered* the little children to come to him. Suffer is the right word. Because in his time adults, particularly important teachers like Jesus, didn't suffer children in their presence. Too unruly. Too unpredictable. Too dirty. Just like a lot of Christians today don't suffer children in worship services all that well, especially if they start crying or moving or otherwise displaying a total lack of old people maturity. Instead of sending the children away, as the disciples apparently, *appropriately* tried to do, they should have been shouting at the top of their lungs to the children's parents, "here he is, over here, do you see him?!!!" They should have been pointing Jesus out. All through the gospel narratives people are trying to protect Jesus from this and that, separate Jesus from the very reasons, the very people, the very brokenness, the very difficulties, the very diseases, the very impurities, the very troubles, the very despicable, disgusting, degrading, desperate, demonic realities of life he was sent to engage. Instead, having seen what the righteous, pure, safe, and saved world saw as despicable, disgusting, degrading, desperate, and demonic, they should have been jumping up and down and shouting, "Hey, you, you over there, you with the disgusting leprosy, you with the degrading 12 year flow of blood, you with the desperate withered limbs, you with the demonic legion of

possessed spirits, Jesus is right here. Right here.” They should have been pointing Jesus out.

Point Jesus out. That’s your Judas job! That is why we are here in this sanctuary this afternoon. We are learning how to know Jesus so well that we’ll be able, when our time comes, to point Jesus out to people who do not know who he is, how he lived, or why he died.

We point Jesus out by teaching and preaching the Gospel. I know that sounds easy. But it’s not. Not in the world we live in. It’s not easy because people, even Christian people, don’t know the stories that share the essence of the man they don’t really know. In a Gallup poll of Americans in the year 2000, the results of the polling demonstrated the following tidbits:

--Only 37% of those interviewed could name all four Gospels.

-- Only half of adults interviewed nationwide could name *any* of the four Gospels of the New Testament.

-- Seven in ten (70%) were able to name the town where Jesus was born, but just 42% could identify him as the person who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Since 2000, we know the numbers have only gotten worse.

How can a world know a man if they don’t know the materials which testify to how the man lived and died? I am so weary of talking to folk who proclaim authoritatively that they know what a Christian ought to do and be and yet they have such little knowledge of any of Jesus’ teachings and actions that should be the foundation for Christian living. You’ve got to point Jesus out to a world of people who have come to somehow think they can be Christian without knowing Jesus, who have come to think they can know Jesus of Nazareth without knowing anything about or written in the Gospel stories that share his life and ministry. Who can have confidence that people who don’t even know the names of the Gospels are actually reading the Gospels? We must point Jesus out.

We point Jesus out by living as he lived, even when the circumstances of living in this world become so daunting as to be oppressive. ***We point Jesus out*** by fighting through the difficulties that face this church and the community it serves with the faith of a man who stepped up before a hostile garden crowd determined to take his life. ***You point Jesus out*** by fighting

through the obstacles that litter the road you have taken to follow your call into discipleship with the courage of a man who fought through the holiness, purity, and ethnic boundaries that separated humans from each other and ultimately humans from God. ***We point Jesus out*** by living his radical life of touching untouchables, of breaking rules that had become policies of oppression, of breaking through boundaries that separated humans from each other and from God even when we hear people telling us that Jesus could not possibly be the one we're pointing to with the kind of life we're living.

When you point Jesus out to people who don't know the names of the gospels or know that he preached the sermon on the mount, they are bound to be shocked at what they hear you say and scandalized by how they see you live. ***When they hear*** that he went to parties populated by prostitutes, ***when they hear*** that he dined with people who were tax collectors fleecing others out of any chance they had for a decent living, ***when they hear*** that he lingered with lepers who were cast out of polite society, ***when they learn*** that he roamed from place to place without guarantee of a place to lay down his head, ***when they learn*** that he broke some of the most important cultic traditions of his time like the Sabbath and dietary laws, ***when they learn*** that he confronted the ethnic and racial prejudice against gentiles and proclaimed that they, too, were God's people, ***when they learn*** that Jesus lived his life in such a way that the Roman and Jewish authorities of the time understood his behavior to be seditious and that he so threatened the very way and order of life and society that they had to put him to death to put his movement to a stop, they won't be angry with Jesus, ***because they don't know Jesus***, but they may very well be mad at you for pointing ***this*** Jesus out.

That is when you will have to reach down and find the strength to do what Judas did.

One thing you can say for Judas: he knew how to focus. Despite everything swirling around him, he stayed locked on Jesus and kept moving to Jesus. He fought through the crowds and the difficulties and the second thoughts and the fear and the anxiety and through it all, he pointed Jesus out.

We must do at least as much as Judas. For a different reason altogether, we must *not* be diverted from our task of pointing Jesus out. The people of our world, for a reason very different than the reason that motivated the high priests, are still seeking Jesus. They often do not want Mark's Jesus. Too often, they want *their* Jesus. An easy Jesus. A comfortable Jesus. A Jesus who looks like they look and lives like they live. A Jesus who demands nothing and asks them to give nothing in return. Our job is to get to know scripture's Jesus, and then to point him out. If Judas could do it for the wrong reason, we can do it for the right reason.

We must not lose focus on why we come here week in and week out, and for many of you day in and day out. We are here to ensure that we learn and, having learned, to go out into the world and point Jesus out.

Do you know someone struggling with a sense of God's call upon their lives and trying desperately to discern what God's will is? Use your own faith journey as a lightening rod to point Jesus out.

Do you know some social or political or religious brokenness? Jump into the middle of it and point Jesus out.

Do you know some desperate soul who feels that all is lost? Navigate your way into their bewildered world and point Jesus out.

Do you know a community or a people struggling to reach their destiny? Step into their world, listen to their dreams, reach out to their needs, dig into your pockets, kneel down hard on your knees, and point Jesus out.

We *do* know a world that is slipping farther and farther away from knowledge of and relationship with God. We want to help that world. *That* is why we are here. We have come to this place to learn from and to learn with each other so that on those days when we find ourselves in the gardens of contemporary life where desperate crowds are wandering in search of direction and meaning, like Judas, we will have spent so much time with the history, tradition, scriptures, and person of the Son of God that we will be able to point Jesus out.