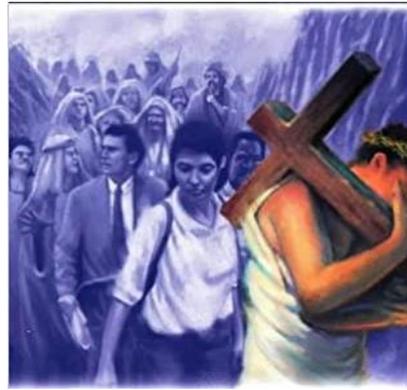


**On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell**  
**Week 5 Choices**  
**Monday - Mountain Aspirations**



*When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

*Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial*

*"You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written:*

*"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'*

*But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."*

*Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."*

*"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."*

*But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.*

*Mark 14:26-31 (NIV)*

It wasn't a difficult climb, following Jesus and his disciples to the Mount of Olives. It wasn't a high hill, not compared to the Alps, or even some of the lesser mountains where the traveller lives - more of a pleasant incline, really, to the top of the grassy mound. But what a height it represented in terms of the cultural memories of the locals/<sup>1</sup> it had been a focal point of worship for the Jews since King David's day (2 Samuel 15:30) and held a powerful association with the Lord's coming even from the days of Zechariah (Zechariah 14:4). It was also a sanctuary in the heart of Jesus and his disciples, where they would withdraw from the pressures of ministry and from where Jesus prepared to make his entry of triumph to Jerusalem. From this Mount he was able to teach his disciples many things in secret. Later, she recalled, Jesus would choose this very hillock from which to ascend into heaven. Not a slope to be sneezed at, she mused.

What a place for Jesus to choose to break the news to Peter of his forthcoming failure. What a location for all the disciples to learn how futile their good intentions would prove to be when it came to the crunch. But wasn't it Zechariah again who had prophesied the strike upon the Shepherd that would

scatter the sheep? (Zechariah 13:7) With so many of the pieces of the jigsaw falling into place, how could they have been so blind? She wondered. How many hints did they need for this crossword puzzle?

They were not engaged in puzzle solving for fun, though. This was real life, and they were living right in the centre of it, putting it together piece by crazy piece. They only had a moment-by-moment experience of what was happening and could not see the big picture with the benefits of hindsight.

At that time, Peter's declaration of his own loyalty was stronger in his mind than the warnings from his Lord. The disciples were having another 'mountain-top experience' on Mount of Olivet and nothing could bring them down to earth. If only Paul had already written his famous letter to the Romans pointing out the conundrum that we cannot do the good things we most want to do (Romans 7:15-20). They might have understood a little better that all the very best intentions in the world, all the gargantuan efforts on their part to do right, would still end in tears. That's why Jesus had to come.

She sighed, wishing that the history of the world in her own time had proved this wrong. After all, a single generation had witnessed the space race to the moon, the triumph of organ transplants, the successful battle against many previous deadly diseases, the mapping of the human development. Yet hospital, schools and homes were no longer guaranteed places of safety. Less and less respect was shown for authority, property or peace, and terrorism held to ransom many great nations. All the affluence in the world had not produced universal sharing of resources to the point of obliterating poverty and famine. All the scientific resources and technology in the world has so far failed to solve the curse at the centre of the problem - the problem of the human heart.

It was a reasonable view from the summit of the Mount of Olives, yet the disciples could not see into the depths of their own hearts. Time and time again during these final days of his physical dwelling upon earth, Jesus tried to warn them, to alert them, to prepare them so that they could guard themselves against the acts of betrayal, denial and desertion that they would soon perpetrate against him.

Tracy settled down upon a cold stone and remembered what the Bible said Judas had planned and was in the process of executing right now. 'Oh, DC,' she moaned, 'I'd have paid him much more that that *not* to do it.' she didn't really expect the dream carrier to appear just then, but, as if he had been awaiting her call, there he was perched on a nearby rock.

'Come on!' he ordered, but there was a lightness in his tone.

'Where are we going? Wait, the others are on their way down the hill. I don't want to lose them.'

'You won't lose them, Tracy,' he sang out as he pulled her in the opposite direction. 'Besides, they're on their way down for a rest in a nice quiet garden. They'll be there most of the night. You can catch up later. We've got a bit of horticulture to do ourselves, girl. Look, another garden!'

Suddenly, as if borne on the air, they both landed in an unfamiliar place and DC began his story.

'It was thousands of years ago when I carried my first dream. I wouldn't like to tell you how long exactly - makes me feel old. But she was so beautiful' the lady, living with Adam in this lovely garden. Eden, they called it then. She really enjoyed the dream about animals and plants and her becoming the mother of all human children. When she wasn't dreaming about the way the garden could develop and grow, she enjoyed great chats with the Boss - and walks, the three of them had great walks together, planning the future.

'Then another dreamer got to her, and he was a real snake in the grass. He told her a lot of lies and made her doubt the plans the Boss had for her. She thought she could do better...'

The traveller stopped him there, mid-flow. 'Eve. You're talking about Eve, aren't you, DC? Well, I know the story, and it has too sad an ending for the way I feel today?'

'Is that right, Tracy? You think the story has an ending, do you?'

She was slowly making her way through avenues of heavily laden fruit trees, trying to avoid snagging her ankles in the matted undergrowth under her feet. 'It's all in a mess, DC. This place hasn't been taken care of, not like the Boss meant it to be.'

DC was chomping on a ripe piece of fruit. 'God harvest though, girl. Pretty abundant, wouldn't you say?'

'That's not thanks to Adam and Eve, is it?'

'Exactly!' he swung round on his heels and looked straight at her, with a serious expression on his face. 'They made a wrong decision, they messed up pretty badly - with the earth, the livestock, the natural resources, the children - but he,' stabbing his thumb at the sky, 'he is still in control of the harvest.'

'You mean its' not over yet?'

'Not by a long chalk, Tracy. They only got to insert the commas and full stops; he writes the book.'

'Couldn't he have taken care of the punctuation too, DC? That might have saved a lot of trouble down through the centuries.'

'Yeah, but what part would they have played in the conversation then, Tracy? God doesn't go around talking to himself. This whole creation thing is about relationship. How was he going to develop a meaningful relationship with creatures who had no say in the matter?'

'So he gave them a say, and Judas as say, and he won't take that away from us, no matter how much we mess up the situation?'

'You go it, traveller,' and DC was grinning at her now. 'Until the end.'

*Dear Creator God,*

*On my walk to Calvary, open my eyes to the decisions you want me to make.*

*When temptation deflects or exhaustion slows me down, or stupidity hinders or pride distorts my path, walk with me and grow only the harvest you have designed for my gathering. Amen.*