

Melody Masha Pierson was a normal mother going about her life. But she was born with bad asthma. Since childhood, she had been in oxygen tents for the winter. As the years went by, it developed into emphysema. Then at the rather early age of 48, doctors told her she needed a double lung transplant to keep on living. She was put on the transplant list and waited while tethered to constant oxygen supply.

Slowly but surely, her name began to progress up the transplant list. She didn't know how much longer she could go on. But finally the call came. On the way to the hospital in an ambulance with her daughter, she cried; not tears of fear because of the major procedure; not tears of joy because of the possibility of a new life but tears of sorrow. She knew that her new lungs meant someone else was dying. While her family would hopefully enter into a celebration of new life, the donor's family would be planning a funeral.

The operation that was supposed to take 6-8 hours ended up taking only 4. Things went beautifully. In two days, she was up walking. This picture comes 2 and a half weeks after the surgery. Her color returned and she began to explore her new lease on life. Yet, she couldn't get the family of the young woman whose lungs now resided in her body out of her mind.

So Melody wrote them a letter which she has posted online. It reads:

Dear Family, I am sure this letter may be difficult to read. It is difficult to write. It is both painful and joyous. The reason I am writing is to thank you an expression which is used quite often and sometimes just in passing. This is a different kind of "Thank you." It is a "Thank you" that defies English, French or any language.

How do you say thank you that means that because of you and your daughter, I am alive to speak any words at all? I am alive at fifty-one years to continue living. The importance and immense meaning of the gift you and your daughter have given me, truly cannot be expressed in words. I can try, though. I must try, because I think you should know that this life that was saved is a life of promise. My promise to you is that I will never waste one moment of it.

I have two grown children of my own. I am a mother, a musician, an artist and a spiritual person. If you can imagine it, before the gift your daughter gave me, it was becoming very challenging to do anything in my life. Brushing my teeth required effort. Eating became difficult. Even with oxygen, I still had to be in a wheelchair if I wanted to go out.

How do I share with you that you gave me life back? That you gave me a better life? My children and my husband thank you. My friends thank you. And I think you should know that not one day goes by that I do not think of the generous spirit of yours, and of the woman who enabled me to breathe again.

To add to that, as a singer and a songwriter, I thought my music was gone forever. As a mother, it became more difficult to see the pain in my children's faces. I want you to know something else. When I got the call they had found a donor for me, and that this person was a young woman, I thought of my own twenty-two year old daughter, who rode with me in the ambulance to the hospital for the surgery. I cried during that whole ride to the hospital. Not because I was scared or happy. I cried because I knew that on that day, somewhere, a family lost a precious, beloved person in their life.

My heart was with you and is still with you. She is with me, literally, with every breath I take. Please know that this woman, who gave me the gift of life, is my hero. I literally owe my life to her and to you, who had the bravery and strength to allow this procedure to take place in the midst of your grief.

*May God Bless You for giving me my life back. For giving me a new life with no more pain. A life where I don't have to fight for every breath I take. I love you without knowing you and I am here as living proof that life goes on. I promise to take good care of her. I promise to honor her with everything I do, especially for others who have suffered like me. I wish you love. And above all, faith in knowing that this beautiful woman has allowed me to live again. Your daughter, in life and in spirit, is a miracle. I am her miracle. Thank you.*¹ (She dedicated the letter to the anonymous donor who through her death gave Melody life. Melody thanked the family but also resolved to live a life honouring the young woman who died so she could have life). How might you respond to the family of someone who gave their loved one's life for you? There might be someone who has received some sort of transplant who can relate very well to Melody's story. Or there might be someone who had a family member die and donate their organs to another. Yet most of us can think we are quite far removed from this scenario.

But are we? If you're a Christian here today, Jesus gave His life for you. He literally gave up His body and life blood, so that you and I could have a new life. We have opportunity to consider that today as we continue in Matthew's Easter account of Jesus' last hours. Last week, we saw Matthew show us that things were coming together so that Jesus

¹ http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/754848/jewish/Letter-to-My-Organ-Donors-Family Accessed March 2, 2017

would certainly be killed. But how did Jesus respond to His forthcoming death? We will discover this today and then have opportunity to think about how we're living in light of the Jesus' life and death for us.

Matthew 26:17-35 (ESV) (Page 701)

¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?"¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at the table with the twelve. ²¹ And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" ²³ He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." ²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' ³² But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." ³³ Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." ³⁵ Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

It is now the day when Passover will arrive at Sundown. Traditional Jewish families had a Passover meal to commemorate their people's deliverance from Egypt. Since Jerusalem was a Jewish city, the entire place stopped for Passover meals and sacrifices. Jesus reveals to the disciples that He has already prepared a place for their Passover meal. They must go into Jerusalem to a certain man and announce the "Teacher says His time is at hand." So he would keep the Passover or eat the Passover meal at this man's house with His disciples. This man must have been a follower of Christ since it would have been risky to host Jesus in light of the religious authorities' hostility. But the man agrees and the disciples make preparations.

In the evening, Jesus is at the table with the 12. And as they eat He drops a bombshell. Jesus states "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Now we already know that it was Judas. Just a few verses previously, he has gone to the chief priests and made a deal to deliver Jesus over to them. But the rest of the disciples do not know this.

In fact, they are very sorrowful verse 22 tells us. They begin to ask Jesus one by one “Is it I Lord?” I found this strange when I first considered it. If I was good friends with someone and they announced that someone in our friend group would betray them, I would not ask them if it was me. I had no intentions of betraying them. I would ask if they knew who it was. But the disciples have seen Jesus’ wisdom and deep perception over the years. They have seen Him uncover their motivations. So they may have begun to grasp their own frailty. They honestly ask the Lord if it was them.

But notice also that none of them immediately concluded it was Judas. No one nodded to their neighbor to take a look at Judas because they all knew there was something funny about him. They are sorrowful. They don’t know who would do such a thing which means Judas had done or said nothing obvious that revealed his true intentions. There wasn’t anything obvious in his behavior or words that betrayed him.

Jesus does not say “It’s Judas.” He only states “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.” There was a little dish that was served with the Sabbath meal containing perhaps the bitter herbs. You would take your bread and dip it in the dish. At some point, Judas and Jesus’ hands must have met in that dish. Maybe their eyes did as well. It seems that had already happened since Jesus says “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me – not He who will dip his hand in the dish with me.

Jesus then states, “The Son of Man (Him) goes as it is written of him,” meaning the things that were about to happen to Jesus were prophesied. “But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born.” Though it was prophesied that Jesus would suffer these things, the one who betrayed him still bore responsibility for the betrayal.

Finally, Judas speaks Jesus. We are not sure if this was done in the hearing of the other disciples or only reported later. But they have a little conversation. Look very carefully at what Judas says. “Is it I, Rabbi?” What did the other disciples say? “Is it I Lord?” In fact, the other disciples always address Jesus as Lord. But Judas calls him Rabbi – a respectful title but not a confession of belief. Jesus responds “You have said so.” He turns Judas’ words upon himself to confirm that he is the betrayer.

Matthew doesn’t tell us when Judas left. But in the Gospel of John we are told he got up and went out because Satan filled him. The fact that the other disciples let Judas go confirms they had little suspicion or knowledge of what was going on. If they knew Judas would betray Jesus, 11 of them could certainly have taken Judas down. But they just

let him go because they're still convinced he's one of them. Yet Jesus knows exactly what's going on. So the first answer to our question today "how does Jesus respond to His forthcoming death?" **He knew that Judas would betray Him but did not stop him.**

I marvel at Jesus' self-control. Yet I am frightened at how Judas seemed to fit in so well. Here was a guy who had been around Jesus for 3 years. He had witnessed all Jesus did and said. He saw the miracles and heard the great teaching. Yet He still didn't believe. That means it's very possible that there are people in our lives and in our church who look like Christians, talk like Christians and act like Christians. But they're not Christians. We need to examine our own hearts about this and we need to continue proclaiming the Gospel to one another. Jesus Christ came to earth. He lived and gave Himself up to die so that our sins were paid for and we could be reconciled to God. To receive this gift of salvation, we need to put our trust on Christ and His Work. We stop trusting ourselves and our work.

We cannot just hang around church and do the Christian activities and try to be a good person and think we're Christians. Sitting in a garage does not make you a car. Doing good deeds and coming to church, while important do not make you a Christian. You must repent from doing your own thing and living your own way and trust Christ and His work for you. Then you begin to walk with Him as Savior and Lord. If you're not sure about this in your life you might want to ask yourself this question. How would you describe Jesus to other people? Is He the founder of Christianity and a good teacher? He is both of those. But is He also your Lord? Do you believe and live as if Jesus is Lord over your life?

The scene continues around the table. The Passover meal contained at least three foods. There were bitter herbs to remind them of the bitterness of slavery that their ancestors endured. There was unleavened bread – bread that was not baked in the oven and rose up into a loaf. That reminded them that after the Passover, their ancestors didn't have time to wait for bread to bake. They had to be ready to leave quickly as soon as the Egyptian Pharaoh released them from slavery. Then there was lamb. Their ancestors had used the lamb's blood to paint their door frames for protection from the death angel. The meal also had four separate cups of wine which served to teach and remind them of God's provision and promise. So each part of the meal had some symbolism. Sometimes, the eldest son would ask the father what all this meant. So the father would explain the symbolism as they ate.

Jesus does something similar here. But he redefines the symbols. First, he takes bread and after blessing it, he breaks it and gives to them to eat. Then He declares "this is my body." In doing so, Jesus demonstrates that His body

will become the fulfillment of the ceremonies surrounding the Passover Lamb. He will become the sacrificial atonement for the passing over of the sins of the people. The breaking of the bread may also reveal that he will suffer a violent death where His body will be broken.

Then he takes the cup. Commentators think this could be the 3rd of the fourth cups of the Passover meal. He gives the cup to them inviting all of them to drink from it. Then he uses sacrificial language to describe its meaning. "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

What is "his blood of the covenant?" Well Israel was a covenant people. A covenant was a solemn agreement between two parties about how they would relate to one another in the Ancient Near East. They were kind of like our modern day contracts but more serious. If you broke covenant with someone they might legally be able to kill you for it. Israel entered into a covenant with God at Mount Sinai after He delivered them from Egypt. This covenant was sealed with blood. God would devote Himself to them. They promised to devote themselves to Him. But they failed. They broke covenant with God through the centuries.

So God sent the prophets to call them back to Himself. When they didn't listen, He pronounced judgment on them. They would be defeated and go into exile. Yet there was still hope. Through the prophet Jeremiah in 31:31-34 we read: ³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

That was about 600 years before this moment. Now Jesus states "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus declares the New Covenant here and will seal it the next day when His blood is poured out on the cross. Poured out points back to that famous Old Testament prophecy called Isaiah 53. There Isaiah talks about a servant who will be violently killed for the purpose of bearing the sins and transgression of others. Through this sacrifice the people will be brought peace and healing. In Isaiah 53:12, Isaiah writes "Therefore, I

will divide him a portion with the many and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, *because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*” Jesus says, “This is my blood of the covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” This is a crucial, vital, turning point in history. The New Covenant is established & started by Jesus at the Last Supper.

Yet it also reveals – how Jesus responded to His forthcoming death? **He declares that His blood would have to be poured out for the forgiveness of many.** That means he knows he’s going to have to die. You can’t just pour out your blood and expect to keep on living. Yet through this new covenant, men and women can be reconciled to God. It’s like we were similar to Melody. We could barely breathe spiritually. We were dying. Then Jesus came along and poured out his blood for our sake. Because of that we receive new life like Melody received new lungs.

Jesus then declares to the disciples “I tell you that I will not drink of this wine again until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom.” Some commentators think this refers to the fourth cup of the Passover meal. Jesus would not drink it to tangibly show to the disciples that they can look forward to future time when they will eat and drink with Him again. That will happen when He returns to establish His kingdom on earth.

So the Last Supper finishes. Then they sing a hymn and begin the two mile trek towards the Mount of Olives. But along the way, Jesus drops another bombshell. “You will all fall away from me this night. For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” This was a quote from the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. If you struck down a shepherd, his sheep wouldn’t know what to do except run.

Jesus predicts this will happen with the remaining 11 disciples. Yet they protest vigorously, especially Peter who declares that even if the others fall away, he never will. Yet Jesus utters that fateful prediction – before the rooster crows, you will deny me 3 times. Peter proclaims that he will go with Jesus to the death along with the other disciples.

It is a dramatic moment. Yet notice what Jesus does not do – run. How does Jesus’ respond to His forthcoming death? **He knew that all of His disciples would desert Him but did not run Himself.** If you knew one of your supposed friends would betray you to the authorities; and the authorities wanted you dead; and your other friends would abandon you, wouldn’t you get out of town? But Jesus remains.

So what have we seen today? Jesus knew Judas would betray Him yet let him go. He declares “His blood would be poured out for many” meaning He knew would have to die. He knows His disciples will desert Him yet He doesn’t

run. So how did Jesus respond to His forthcoming death? **Jesus would willingly be killed.** Last week, Jesus would certainly be killed. Jesus faced His death willingly

Yet, Jesus faced His death willingly with hope. Did you notice the hope? 26:29 - "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom". We and the disciples will one day drink with Him at a great banquet. And even as He warns them about their upcoming desertion He brings hope. "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." A resurrection is coming.

Yet before that, Jesus would give of His life and blood for you and me. Because of Him we have new life. When Melody Pierson received her new lungs, she promised the family of the donor to never waste a day with the life she'd been given. May we never waste a day of the new life Christ has given us.