

Sermon Notes for 3/2/16 (Midweek Lent 4)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Luke 22:47-53

Theme: A TIME TO FIGHT – A TIME TO – WHAT?!

Hymn: LBW 92 (Were You There When They Crucified My Lord)

The Point: Jesus refused to fight against the Father's will, even when it demanded His betrayal and arrest.

Introduction: “This is your hour – when darkness reigns.” What an indictment Jesus speaks to those who have come to arrest Him in the garden. How often people try to use the cloak of darkness to paper over whatever they are doing that is illegal, immoral, unethical, or just plain wrong! Robbery and thefts happen often at night, while most people are asleep and their guards are down.

So Judas comes during the night watch, leading his motley group of Jewish leaders. Luke tells us the group consisted of “chief priests, officers of the temple guard, and elders.” They come well-armed, ready for a fight, should one develop. The chief priests seem to be the chief organizers. Judas had met with them and the officers of the temple guard in arranging for the betrayal of Jesus. Did Judas see this as a betrayal – or was there some other motivation at work? We are not able to read back into his mind just what he was thinking or what he wanted to accomplish by turning Jesus over to these people who hated him.

Did Judas think that this action would prompt the crowds, who had yelled “Hosanna” for Jesus on Sunday, to rise up and rebel against those who tried to take action against this Rabbi from Nazareth? Was he trying to foment rebellion? Did he have a political revolution as his goal? He did seem to be remorseful as Jesus' trial was drawing to a bloody conclusion – saying “I have betrayed innocent blood.” But at that point it was too late to change things in terms of Jesus' suffering, and Judas could not live with that any more.

As the crowd surrounded Jesus and the disciples, Judas gave Jesus the signal kiss that had been arranged to let the crowd know whom to grab. Jesus' followers were in a panic. Someone asked, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” Not willing to wait for an answer, impetuous Peter grabbed his sword and whacked off the ear of the high priest's servant. He was ready to fight – if necessary, to die – in Jesus' cause. I am surprised that he didn't take the first swing at Judas. Maybe Judas was backpedaling seriously, staying at a good distance from Peter and the other disciples.

Mistreatment and injustice often prompt this reaction of fighting against those who perpetrate the injustice. We want to strike back, to get revenge, to get even, to make sure that the people who are handing out hurt to others have it stuck to them. And what more righteous cause could the disciples have had than the defense of their Savior and Leader? If anyone was worth fighting for, it was the Master who had been leading them for these several years and whose teaching was so grand and glorious.

But they forgot one key point. In fact, THE key point of Jesus' teaching had to do with the type of Messiah He had come to be. He had come for this very purpose: to suffer. He had not come to cause suffering – and He even healed the one casualty of the encounter between the disciples and the crowd. He touched the place where Peter had struck and removed the ear of the servant of the high priest, and the man was healed immediately. Jesus had not come to cause death. Jesus had come with this very intention: to die and in His dying to be the death of death itself. It would not be a pretty or easy or tranquil death, either. It would be violent and bloody, for without shedding of blood there is NO forgiveness. Jesus' sentencing, torment and crucifixion were the final demonstration of the proof of that Old Testament principle.

No, this was not the time for fighting. Jesus would not fight to defend Himself. He denies that privilege to

His followers also. In fact, Jesus lives out the horrendous truth embodied in His prayer to the Father: “Thy will be done.” Submission to the powers of darkness was the style of His Messiahship. It was not the time for fighting the Jewish leaders, but it was the time for submitting to those who were under the influence of Satan. It was the time for serving like no one had ever served before. Jesus said, “The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve – and to give His life as a ransom for many.” Jesus submitted to the powers of darkness here because He was submissive to the will of the Father. Jesus submitted to suffering and death, because that was the only way that sin and death and the grave and Satan himself would be finally overcome, once and for all. By His serving, we are set free from the pain and agony that sin has caused in our lives and in our world.

This was not the time for fighting, because the will of God would not be accomplished by threat of arms or movement of battleships or multiplication of nuclear missiles. God’s will is done by Jesus’ willing acceptance of pain, rejection, torture, humiliation, and all the rest that lay ahead of Him during these dark hours in the Garden, in the high priest’s house, before Pilate’s tribunal and Herod’s throne, on the road to Golgotha, and on the cross itself. He could have won a fight hands-down, no questions asked. Matthew’s gospel records the words of Jesus to Peter: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” So the angels and the disciples had to stand by and watch and wait and wonder what would be the outcome. But Jesus was confident that the outcome was the salvation of the world, including you and me.

If Scripture says it must happen this way, then Jesus will not fight against it. If Scripture says it happens this way, it must be this way and no other. So Jesus eagerly submits to the will of the Father, who had appointed the way of sorrows for the Messiah to walk.

Here in the state of hockey, many people still remember Stan Mikita, a professional hockey star who spent his career with the Chicago Black Hawks. Mikita used to get into a lot of fights during games. But his career took a definite turn after his eight-year-old daughter asked a very grown-up question: “How can you score goals when you’re always in the penalty box, Daddy?” (*Bits & Pieces*, July, 1990, p. 19) Fighting took a back seat in his playing from then on. It is hard for us to let our light shine for Jesus if our primary stance in life is that of a boxer, always looking for a fight.

Conclusion: Jesus refused to fight against the Father’s will, even when it demanded His betrayal and arrest and the further experiences of His Passion. He also refused to allow His followers to fight on His behalf, admonishing them to put down their weapons, even undoing the damage that Peter had inflicted on the servant of the high priest by healing his detached ear. To you and me today, our Savior provides the encouragement to live as servants to those who need our support, knowing that He has already won the war. The victory has been pledged to us, and we need not fight further when we have already had the winning goal scored for us! In the blessed name of Jesus, AMEN!