

The G.O.A.T.: 6. Greatest Redeemer
John 18:1-7, 19:16-20
April 10, 2022
Pastor Tami Luckhardt

For the past five weeks, we've been on a journey together reading the Gospel of John. If you are just joining us, I want to invite you jump in this week as we read the 18th and 19th chapters of John as they lead us through the events of Holy Week and to the cross on Good Friday. Today, we arrive at the dramatic climax of John's gospel, and we turn our gaze from the hopeful, enthusiastic crowds waving palm branches in Jerusalem to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, and we listen as the people's cries turn from "hosanna" to "crucify him." One of the major themes in John's account is that it is precisely here, in his suffering, that Jesus is revealed to be, not the military king who many hoped for, but the long-awaited Messianic King. And it is here that we see his hour of glory as he suffers and dies on the cross, giving himself to the world.

Once again, we see the details of John's account differ from what is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Even if they might seem like little details, they are intentional and so we should pay attention. John was probably the last of the four gospels to be written so he most likely was familiar with the other accounts of Jesus' crucifixion. While the other gospel writers told us **what** happened, John wants us to understand **what it all means**. John intentionally chooses to tell the story differently and so he gives us some clues or signs that point toward deeper meaning and help reveal the significance of Jesus, and the cross. Today we'll focus on two parts of this story. We'll start with Jesus' arrest and then go to Jesus' crucifixion. Let's begin.

It was late on a Thursday night. Jesus and his disciples had just finished what was to be Jesus' final meal. Last week, Pastor Steve walked us through what happened at that meal, how Jesus took on the role of a servant and washed the feet of his disciples, showing them what the love of God looks like and what it means to follow Jesus. Now, with the supper over, they left the upper room and made their way down Mount Zion, passing through the Kidron Valley to a garden at the base of the Mount of Olives. While Luke just calls it a garden, the other gospel writers name this garden Gethsemane. We know it was dark, probably around midnight and Judas arrived with a cohort/company of soldiers "carrying lanterns, torches and weapons."

Here is where Matthew, Mark and Luke focus their stories on Jesus' human agony. Mark tells us that Jesus said, "I am deeply grieved, even to death... he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him." (Mark 14:33-35) Matthew's account is similar, and Luke adds that Jesus was in such agony that his "sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground" and he prays, "Father, if it's your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done." (Luke 22:44) Matthew, Mark and Luke write to emphasize the humanity of Jesus, his pain and agony.

But John doesn't include any of this. Instead, he focuses on Jesus' divinity. He wants to remind us that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus the King, firmly in control of his destiny approaches it with strength and dignity. John tells us that Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him and when Judas and the soldiers arrived, Jesus went out of the garden. He didn't stay hidden within the garden, he went out, approached Judas and the cohort. A cohort is a tactical military unit of the Roman army, and it consists of about 480 soldiers. Can you picture 480 soldiers showing up to arrest one person? This illustrates the perceived threat that Jesus represents.

Then John reports what happened next. Jesus asked, "Who are you looking for? They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." And he said to them, "I Am." You may recall that "I AM" is the name that God gave Moses when Moses asked, "Who shall I say sent me?" And then, two weeks ago we read the seven *I Am* statements in John's gospel that Jesus made describing who He is and why he has come. And here, in the garden, with just the mention of that name, I AM, the soldiers shrank back and fell to the ground. What John wants us to understand by including that detail is that Jesus is identifying with God. John captures Jesus' authority, courage, and hidden identity. 480 of Rome's finest soldiers shrank back and fell to the ground. With all that heavy armor on, I picture them like turtles on their back. I imagine it was difficult for them to quickly get back on their feet, which could have allowed time for Jesus to have escaped, if he had wanted to. And yet, the King, willing gave himself for the arrest. This is hardly a Jesus in anguish throwing himself to the ground and asking for the cup to pass by him, as portrayed in the other gospels. In fact, in John's gospel, Jesus asks, "Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11) I think both images of Jesus are important for us to fully understand how Jesus is fully human and fully divine, but John writes to remind us of Jesus' divinity and to understand that Jesus is in complete control of the situation.

We need to take a minute here and talk about Judas. Judas was one of the original 12 disciples invited by Jesus to follow him. I think Jesus knew the condition of Judas' heart, that he was a thief, but he still called him. Perhaps that's precisely why he called him. And Judas, like the other 11, left everything behind to follow Jesus, his friends and family, his home, his job. And for 3 years, he watched and listened he followed Jesus as he as healed the sick, taught about the kingdom of God and told stories about who God is. But somewhere along the way, Judas became critical of Jesus. Judas expected Jesus to be a great military leader that would lead a revolution and overthrow the oppressive Roman government and restore the Kingdom of Israel. But Jesus wasn't living up to that image. He was saying things like, "Love your enemy. Pray for those who persecute you. Turn the other cheek." This was not at all what Judas had signed up for. Judas was growing increasingly disappointed in Jesus. This could be why he decided to turn Jesus over to the Jewish leaders. I don't think Judas expected them to kill Jesus. I think he was hoping to force Jesus' hand to rise up and be the military leader that Judas, and a whole lot of other people, expected Jesus to be.

In chapter 12, John gives us another reason why Judas might have decided to betray Jesus. Jesus was at the home of Lazarus to have dinner with him and his sisters, Mary and Martha. While Martha was serving dinner, Mary took an extraordinary amount of very expensive perfume and poured on Jesus' feet. John tells us that this perfume was worth one year's wages. In 2021, in the US, the average income was about \$58,000. Can you imagine pouring something that expensive on someone's feet? Judas couldn't and he complained loudly. *"This perfume was worth a year's wages! Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.)* (John 12:5-6) In the very next verse, Jesus rebuked Judas and said, *"Leave her alone... you will always have the poor among you but you won't always have me."* It is after this that Judas decided to betray Jesus.

This takes us now to Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Unlike what is described in the other three gospels, in John's gospel, Jesus did not appear before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling counsel. Instead, he appeared briefly before Annas, the former high priest, and Caiaphas, the reigning high priest but very little is said about these trials except that they agreed Jesus must die. And they handed him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate to be tried. Pilate's job was to maintain peace in the region, and to make sure Roman's power was exerted at all time, in all places and in all situations.

And so Pilate put Jesus on trial but found no basis for putting him to death. He sensed that Jesus was indeed, more than he seemed. In fact, he referred to him repeatedly as "king". But still, he sent him off to be tortured, they put a crown of thorns on his head and a purple robe on his back and they start slapping him in the face saying, "Hail, King of the Jews". Then, Pilate paraded him out before the crowd and said, "Behold, the man." And the crowd, including the religious leaders, cried, "Crucify him!" In his heart, Pilate knew the right thing to do and that was to release Jesus, but he was afraid, worried about his reputation, his image, and his career and so, he sentenced Jesus to die on a cross.

Every criminal who was crucified had a sign hung over their head that named their crime. The sign over Jesus' head read, "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews." It is only John who tells us that this sign was posted in three languages, Aramaic, Latin and Greek. Aramaic was the language of the Jews but Latin and Greek were the languages of the rest of the world. And so inadvertently, it was a Roman governor who becomes the first to declare Jesus the King... and not just to Jews but to the entire world. Jesus, with the crown of thorns on his head, enthroned on a cross, his glory is revealed. He is a king who embraces death to redeem his people. What kind of king would willingly give himself as a ransom, an offering to save his people? Jesus. Jesus sacrificed himself to redeem God's people and to save us from sin and death.

It was on Palm Sunday 2014, when Mindy Corporon's life was changed forever. Her father and 14-year-old son, Reat, had gone to the Jewish Community Center in Overland Park, Kansas so that Reat could audition for a talent show. But instead, they were met in the parking lot by a white supremacist with a heart full of hate, a gun in his hand and a plan to kill Jewish people. Three people were killed that day, including Mindy's father and son. None of them were Jewish, they were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. As you can imagine, their deaths shattered Mindy's soul. Her world would never be the same. It was seven years later, and only by seeing the killer's sin through the light of the cross, that Mindy was able to forgive him and let go of her anger and pain. The cross liberated her hurt and her need for revenge. This is a picture of the power of the cross.

Jesus' death on the cross is a message of love from God. Remember how John's gospel begins? "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God....and the Word became flesh and made his home among us." (John 1:1, 14) God's desire to reveal God's self and God's desire for our lives and what it means to be human, is Jesus, God's Word made flesh. I think sometimes we get this all wrong. It wasn't that God needed Jesus to suffer and die on the cross in order for God to forgive us. It was that WE need Jesus' death on the cross in order for us to understand the grace, mercy and redemption that God offers to us. We need a redeemer.

We all sin. All of us. It's the human condition. We see it in the news every day, Politicians. Athletes. Teachers. Business leaders. Celebrities. Pastors. We all sin. Me and you. You know how it goes; a prominent, seemingly upstanding individual in their church or community who serves others, gives generously of their time and treasure is exposed for illegal activity. And their sin not only impacts their lives, but it also impacts on others' lives as well, their family and friends, business partners, sometimes innocent bystanders, like Mindy's father and son. Sometimes we sin because of what we do and sometimes we sin because of what we do not do. Sometimes we sin when we think no one is looking and other times, we are unapologetic for our sin. Whenever we sin against one another, we are sinning against God. So, what can we do about that? In the Romans, the Apostle Paul says, "I'm sold as a slave to sin. I don't know what I'm doing because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing I hate." (Romans

7:14b-15) We cannot save ourselves. We need a savior. Sin may seem to own us but the death of Christ is intended to free us from sin. On the cross, Christ both bears our sin and shows us the way of selfless love. Only Jesus can redeem us and set us free.

And so, we look at the cross, scratch our head and ask, so how exactly does this work? How can someone who died 2,000 years ago save us from our sins today? I have to be honest with you, I don't fully understand how this works, but then I've sat with people and heard the pain of their story, doing what they knew they should not have done or not doing what they should have done and now they are living with that pain and guilt and it's eating away at them. What should I do? I can't keep living this way. How can I ever be free from this pain and guilt? The answer is in the cross. Jesus paid the price for what you cannot do for yourself. Only Jesus can redeem us. The cross is for you and me. God is saying – you are in need of saving. I will forgive you and set you free.

When I see the price that was paid for my forgiveness, I am overwhelmed. I want to change. I want to live a different way. And if you want that too, all you need is to say "Yes", yes to what God would do for you.

Prayer: Yes, Lord. I trust you as my king. Help me to follow you, to love you and to serve you in my life. I embrace you as my redeemer. Save me from myself. Make me the person you want me to be. All that I am and all that I have, I offer to you. In your holy name, amen.