



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 20, 2008

Midweek Lenten Worship

Pastor Randy Ott

### ***Crossroads – Traveling with Our Savior***

Do you think of yourself as a good listener? Think of how important listening is so you can understand people, so you can know where they're at, so you can read not only their words but their body language to see if they are troubled or worried or nervous. If you aren't a good listener, you aren't going to pick up on a lot of those things and you won't know when someone desperately needs a word of encouragement or a word of comfort or a word of strength from our God.

Have you ever found yourself as you are listening to someone say something that you just want to respond to right away and you don't really catch the rest of what they are saying because you are so busy thinking about what you want to say and you don't want to forget it? So you miss what they are saying to you. Sometimes we don't listen all that well because something like that happens.

Other times we don't listen all that well because maybe the place we are talking in isn't conducive to hearing. One of my great fears as a pastor is that some day I'm going to be talking to someone after church on a Sunday morning in our basement, where the sound kind of bounces all around, and some sweet little old lady is going to tell me "I just was diagnosed with some disease" and I am going to smile and say "that's nice" because I didn't hear what they said. So if I ever do that to you, just slap me and say "That's not what I said" so I get the right message, okay? There are things at times that do keep us from listening.

The Word of God I just read to you in this Traveling with Our Savior, this Crossroad that takes us from the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday to Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, is an example of people not listening close enough. We see it in the disciples. So we want to focus on listening and listening carefully because you are going to hear something in these Words from our God that are unexpected, undesired and unbelievable. If you get too caught up on the undesired, then you miss out on the wonderful message of the unbelievable. That is what happened to the disciples that night.

Last week we were with Jesus Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week. Wednesday not much happened. Now we join him again on Thursday and an awful lot has happened. He made some impressive arrangements for celebrating the Passover by sending his disciples to places where he knew what they were going to say and what they were going to do. They had celebrated the Passover together. Jesus had washed their feet in a surprising way. He had eaten the bitter herbs with them. He asked the questions

that were part of the Passover celebration. They had done the things that led them to remember how God had caused the Angel of Death to pass over those doors of the Israelites who had the door frames covered in blood. Jesus had dipped his hand with the bread into the bitter herbs and said, "The person that dips it in with me is the one who is going to betray me" and identified his betrayer. Then he said "What you are going to do, go and do quickly."

That had to weigh heavy on his heart, you would think, as he starts that journey that takes him across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane. There are a lot of things, when you stop and think about it, that had to weigh heavily on Jesus when they were about to begin that journey. Within 24 hours he would be dead and there would be holes in his hands and his feet. In 24 hours there would be dried blood that trickled down his forehead and gaping wounds in his back from the whips. But not only that, he was going to go through the very agony of hell in your place and in my place and in the place of everyone in the world. He knew what he was about to endure. That's why he cried out "My God, if it is possible, take this cup from me." He knew it. Yet before he goes to pray that prayer, "Lord, take this away, if there is any way, take this away. I don't really want to do this. This isn't what I am looking forward to."

But before he left, did you notice what he did? Did you listen closely and hear what he did? Did you hear the unexpected? He sang a hymn of praise. Would you expect that? If you knew you were about to go through all of this, would you really want to sit down and sing Thousand, Thousand Thanks Shall Be, Dearest Jesus Unto Thee like we did this evening? Fourteen thousands, that's how many times we sang it, right? Would you want to do that if you knew everything that was coming? Would you expect yourself to be praising God in song, or would you see yourself more pleading with God to take this away? Jesus didn't say "My heart's too heavy. I'm too full of grief. There's too much going on. We are going to skip the closing hymn. I just don't feel like it." Instead he sings a hymn of praise because, although he prayed "Lord, take this away," it was his will and in complete agreement with the Father's will, our redemption. So he sang a hymn of praise because he knew that redemption was drawing nigh.

Our praise is a little more muted during Lent. We don't sing the Alleluias to remind ourselves of the somber nature of the season, to highlight the glory that comes on Easter morning when we can sing them again with gusto. But yet, we still can have a hymn of praise humming in our heads like Thousand, Thousand Thanks Shall Be, Dearest Jesus Unto Thee because we know the end of the story. We know that although our sins caused his suffering, we know that he suffered and died to take away our sin. We know that he did it all because he dearly wants each and every one of us to be with him in heaven for all eternity. So even when we mute our praise a little bit, there still is a joy in our hearts that passes all understanding because he did this for us, and that is such a precious, precious truth.

So as Jesus began that walk through the Kidron Valley, up the side of the Mount of Olives, maybe that hymn of praise was humming in his head. But soon the humming gave way to a stark reality that he needed to speak to his disciples about. He had to tell them the undesired. He stopped someplace on the Mount of Olives, or he talked with

them along the way, we aren't really told clearly, but he looked at each one of them and said "Tonight, you will all fall away." As he said this there were probably some disbelieving looks, so he backs up his statement with the power of the Word of God. "For it is written" he says (and it is written in Zachariah 13), "I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered."

Put yourself in their shoes for a minute. Your mom, your spouse comes to you and says "You know, over the next three weeks, I am going to go through some really tough times and I know you aren't going to be there for me." How would you react? Would you debate them and say "I'd never walk away from you. I'd never leave you. I'll never let you down." Would you get your back up? Would you get a little defensive? Would you think in your mind "How dare you say such a thing to me?" That's where the disciples were, right? They loved Jesus dearly and now he was telling them that they are all going to desert him. So they react. Peter again as the spokesman saying "No, I'll never leave you." Peter has to then be confronted by Jesus with the fact that he would not only desert him but he would disown him three times. Again Peter jumps in and says "even if I have to die with you I will never disown you." All the others chimed in and echoed Peter's words.

They heard something this time. They could hear it clearly and they didn't like what they heard, so they reacted. They reacted immediately and they reacted forcefully. Think of the audacity of their reaction. Here is Jesus, the One they know can read thoughts, the One they know has all kinds of power, the One they have seen do things that are beyond believing, he looks them in the eyes and says "you are going to desert me" and then he backs it up with Scripture. And they had the audacity to stand there and say "no, you, Scripture, it's all wrong. It's not going to happen."

We would never do that now, would we? Hasn't God looked you and I in the eye and said "Forgive as we have been forgiven" and we say, "That's right God. You tell those other people to forgive me, but this grudge I am carrying, it's got two handles and some wheels. It's got some legs. It's going to stick around for awhile." Love your neighbor as yourself is something God has said to us pretty clearly. We are all for it, but there are times when we aren't.

Love me above everything else is something he said to us. The First Commandment—the one he wanted to drive home the most because it's the one you are going to memorize most often as you start at the beginning and work your way through as you are growing up. Love me beyond anything else. Fear, love and trust in Him above all things. We say "You bet Lord, but you know what? This pleasure that isn't necessarily according to your Word, I am going to do it tonight. This person, I'm sorry, but right now I love them more than I love you. This trinket, this toy, this bauble, this bead, right now it's a little more important that I have it than you." We've all done it. We've all been confronted with the clarity of God's Word. It's been held up like that mirror we learned about in Confirmation Class and it shines into our eyes and we see what wretched, pitiful people we are. We had heard God speak clearly. Then he says to us also, so crystal clear, "When you think you are standing firm, be careful lest you fall." You and I think we'll never fall.

You and I need to be close to our God because on our own, we don't have the strength to stand. You and I need to be close to God because so often we have fallen. We've turned our own directions, so we desperately need to hear the message that is so vital that yes, the Shepherd is going to be struck. Yes, Jesus did die. But there is a message he spoke to those disciples that I have to believe they kind of missed, because they heard something that bothered them and they wanted to answer it. It is the message you and I need to hear when we have sinned. It is the message they needed to hear as they faced all the difficulties they were going to face over the next 48-72 hours and they didn't know what was going on. They needed this message, but I think they didn't hear it because they were so focused on the undesired that they didn't pay attention to the unbelievable.

Did you catch it? Right after he said "I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered," he continued with an incredible promise, "but after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Yes, the devil has a great plan, strike the shepherd; it does scatter the sheep, but it doesn't win the victory because "I am going to rise. I am not going to stay dead. My life and my death in your place will be an acceptable sacrifice to the Father. I will be put in a tomb, but the tomb won't hold me." It's something that God had said some thousand years before it happened, right? Psalm 16, the Psalm of David that we sang tonight—Nor Will You Let Your Holy One See Decay—a thousand years before it happened, God said the grave wasn't going to hold him.

Then Jesus says, "After I have risen"—that is the comforting truth for you and me when we have sinned, when we have been confronted with the clarity of God's Word and went in some other direction, we need to hear Christ has risen. The grave didn't hold him. Salvation is absolutely completed because the tomb was empty. This is what he talked about on Maundy Thursday because he knew they needed it. This is what he is talking about to us and he wants us not only to hear it, but to listen to it and take it in deep for all those times that we have sinned to know that we are forgiven. Because then, all the more we are going to want to listen to one another so that we can encourage and comfort one another with that truth—Jesus rose; the victory is won.

This is the truth that is essential in your life, in my life, and in the life of every person that we will ever meet. Whether they know it or not yet, this is the essential truth—Jesus died and rose again! Our sins have been forgiven! As we face things that trouble us and worry us, we have this rock-solid truth to fall back on and give us the confidence that the One who spread out his arms to have them nailed to the cross is also the One who is going to spread those same arms out to sustain me and uphold me and be with me!