



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
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March 4, 2009
Midweek Lenten Worship
Mark 14:60-65
Pastor Randy Ott

Forgive Our Desire to Defy Your Divine Authority!

In the late 1800s, William Ernest Henley wrote a poem. I believe he was an Englishman. He wrote the poem "Invictus," Latin for unconquerable. In it he wrote lines like "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." In this poem he rages against the meandering forces of chance that bring difficulty into life and the difficulty of age and how he stands up and faces it all like he's on the bridge of his ship. He doesn't wince. He doesn't cry out. He takes it all on unconquerably. A lot of people who read it found it very courageous, very inspiring. It's the kind of stuff we eat up in our country, the idea that we are in control of our own fate, we are the master of our own soul and captain of our own fate.

It's not really that new of an idea. I think that's exactly what we see in the Sanhedrin that we just read about, the high priest and all of his cronies that put Jesus on this mock trial on that first Maundy Thursday. They viewed themselves as the captain of their soul, the master of their fate, and they felt their fate was bound in making certain that Judea, the children of Israel, its kingdom still existed even though the Romans had swallowed up many countries like this. So they put their ear to the ground, did a lot of political maneuverings and a lot of things to keep themselves in some sort of power. Maybe they did it because they wanted the people of God to still be in that Promised Land so that the Messiah could come. Maybe they started out with those noble causes. But somewhere along the line it came to be more about them than about God, more about them being in control, more about them having authority, more about them trying to play Pilate like he's on puppet strings even though he was the conqueror and they were the conquered. They didn't want anyone to come along and get in the way of that authority or to undermine their authority or put a problem between them and the people because they needed the people on their side if they were going to carry on this war they evidently thought they were waging against Rome. They had to have the people there.

So along comes Jesus, who for the past three years had taught with authority, performed miracles, and spoke in ways they didn't speak. They were just repeating the stuff that had always been handed down to them. Jesus comes and teaches and speaks with authority all through the season of Epiphany, and they didn't like it. They put up with it for awhile. They tried to turn him. They tried to ask him different questions and finally enough was enough. Now they were chafing under this authority that he taught with, this authority that he performed these miracles with, and they finally

came to the conclusion that they had to get rid of him. So they had their faces reddened while Jesus was riding that donkey through those palm and coat-laden streets where people were shouting out “Hosanna to the Son of David.” That must have driven them nuts. The people were calling him the Messiah.

So they gather together even with their arch enemies now and they plot against Jesus. They go to him in the temple, try to trip him up with questions about Rome and paying taxes to Caesar. They try to trip him up with “all these guys have all these wives and they all die, who is going to be married to whom in heaven?” They try to do all these things to discredit Jesus in the face of the people. None of it worked. So finally they bribe one of his disciples with 30 pieces of silver. They get him arrested. They put him in this sham trial. They bring in the witnesses they had rehearsed to bring their charges against him, and they screw it up. They don’t do anything. They can’t agree on anything, and there’s nothing but problems even as they are trying to squash him like a bug. Here is this Jesus exercising some kind of authority that they couldn’t overcome and it was driving them nuts.

So finally the high priest just flat out says, “Are you the Christ?” Jesus doesn’t answer. “I charge you by the living God” one of the other gospel writers tells us. “Are you the Christ?” “I am, and you are going to see the Son of Man coming in glory, sitting at the right hand of God, coming on the clouds of heaven.” Do you think they heard any of that? The Son of Man coming in his glory? Do you think they heard him saying anything except that he was the Christ so that now they could accuse him of blasphemy? Now they could get rid of his authority. His authority was there. The truth was right there in front of them. If the truth would have had teeth, it would have bit them and there would have been blood running down their legs, right? It was right there.

But because they were chafing under his authority, they didn’t want any of it. They defied his divine authority, brushed it to the side as though it was a crumb on their beard, and said “let’s kill him. He’s worthy of death.”

Now they have the people back on their side. They figure they can manipulate Pilate. And you know the rest of the story. They were confronted with this authority of Jesus and they couldn’t stand it. They wanted none of it.

Here’s one of the great lies and deceptions of Satan. He gives us the vision of eagles when it comes to seeing the sin of someone else, right? We sit here and hear what these guys did and think “What a bunch of louts, losers. How could anyone do such a thing? I’d never do such a thing. I’d never defy Jesus’ divine authority.”

Well, hold on a minute. Are you telling me that you’ve never heard one of God’s commands and thought to yourself “why? Why do I have to do that?” You’ve never thought to yourself “this is keeping me from fun in life. This has taken away the joy of my life. I want to go do what all the rest of the people do that don’t serve God or love God. I want to chase my own tail. I think God’s just trying to keep the fun out of my life.” Have you ever asked someone the question, I’ve had this question numerous

times in my life and in my ministry, someone coming to me and saying “How far can I go and then it’s sin?” Well where does that question come from? Is that coming from the part of you that loves God and wants to know how far you can get away from him and still be connected to him? I don’t think so. That kind of question always comes from the sinful nature that wants to know what it can get away with, how much it can push the boundaries so that then it can sooth its conscience by saying “I went quite a ways down the line but I didn’t cross over into sin.” We can pound our fists and say, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman” like people have. We can say “But officer, I only had one drink” as we are trying to walk the line. We defy Jesus’ authority all the time because we think we know better. Sin basically makes us stupid.

Parents—did you ever get up in the morning and ask your kids on a Sunday morning “Are you singing in church today?” Then they say “no” so you say, “Well, we don’t have to go to church then today.” It’s pretty much the First Commandment isn’t it? Love God above everything else. We are certainly tempted to defy that divine authority and love ourselves, our sleep, our pleasure, our family more than we love God. We defy his authority. We push back at it in many ways and many times. Sometimes out of weakness. We just can’t resist that juicy bit of gossip. We’ve just got to share it with someone. And sometimes we think in our head “that’s gossip, that’s sin, but I don’t care. I’m going to do it anyhow.” We are rubbing shoulders with the Sanhedrin. We are standing on the bridge of our ship saying “I’m the master of my fate. I’m the captain of my soul and this is the direction I want to go. If you don’t like it God; tough, deal with it, would you.”

During this Lenten season we will see ourselves standing shoulder to shoulder with a lot of people we don’t really want to. But we’ll also see that our Savior cried out “Father, forgive them, not just for them, but also for us.” While you and I at times chafe under the authority of God and his will for us, Jesus humbly submitted to the Father’s will and he did it because you and I just don’t. He did it because you and I are stained by our sins. So he perfectly, humbly submitted to the Father’s will.

Think of what that included. You heard what I read. He tells them the truth; the truth that could save them eternally, and their reaction—spittle running down his beard, blindfolds, slaps, mocking, laughing, ridicule. Did you ever have someone get in your face and challenge you or do things like this? Probably not exactly like this, but anything like this where your back gets up. Maybe you’ve restrained yourself and haven’t done anything back because you think of the passage “It’s mine to avenge, says the Lord.” Jesus was the Lord. It is his to avenge. Could you or I have told him, “No you can’t turn that guy into a pile of ashes that just spit on you. That would be wrong.” But he didn’t because it was his Father’s will that he endure all of this, that he humbly walk the path that led to the cross so that he could live perfectly in our place and submit to the Father’s will perfectly in our place and then die on the cross in our place with all of our sins. He set aside his own interests and put our interest ahead of his own because it was the Father’s will.

When the Spirit leads us to see that, to believe that, to know the affect of that for our lives, that it means our sins have been removed, all of our rebelling against God, all the times we've shaken our fist at God and said, "I don't care. I'm doing it anyhow." Christ carried every last one of those to the cross. When we see that, when we realize that, when we understand that - that he did all this for us - then we, for Jesus' sake, cry out "Lord, teach us to submit to your will. Teach us to place ourselves under you and your authority and live for you." Through the Spirit enlightening us and giving us a little bit of smarts in our head, we begin to understand that if God said "Do this, don't do that," it's because he has our best interest at heart. He isn't doing it to withhold the fun from us. He's doing it because he knows what is best for us. We can be absolutely certain of that because he didn't spare his own son.

If he loved us that much to die for us, he's not just sitting up in heaven giggling saying "Look at what I'm keeping them from doing. Look at all the fun I'm keeping them from having." He's telling us "Don't do that or do that" because it is what is best for us. When the Spirit leads us to see that, we submit to his will. We say "Lord, I screwed up. I don't always do it perfectly, but help me get better at it because I know you want to bless me through this. I know it will be for my good in this life and the next life to live in response to your love, to live focused on that love, to live empowered by that love, to live in a way that expresses your love in everything I think, say and do."

When it comes down to it, we are never master of our own soul or captain of our own fate. We are either a slave to Satan or we are a slave to God. There is no in between. The only time you and I think that there is, it's Satan lying in our ears.

I don't want to be master of my fate. I don't want to be captain of my soul. I'd screw it up. So would you. This is why there is joy in knowing God is the master of our fate. The One who loved us enough to die for us loves us enough to be with us, strengthen us, and guide us until he brings us to that heavenly home.