



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Midweek Lenten Service
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One of the Mob, the Follower

I'm sure you're all somewhat familiar with a term like "mob mentality." You see it played out in little things and in big things. One minute the whole crowd is cheering the team and the next minute they're all booing the team. One minute the coach is a genius and the next minute he's an idiot. Then in some bigger things you see a crowd all of a sudden become a frenzied mob. Sometimes it can be very frightening. I remember watching on the news in Egypt and some of the things that were going on there as these frenzied mobs were doing various things and at various buildings. It can be quite intimidating. Like when the power goes out in large cities and mobs start looting. It can be not a pretty picture.

I kind of think the second one, this not a pretty picture, is more what was going on when we read about Jesus in Matthew 27 here. This crowd that was probably filled with some people that earlier that week had shouted "Hosanna" or the "Lord saves us," words of praise to Jesus, now were shouting "Crucify him." You have to think to yourself a little bit, "How could that happen? How could you go from one extreme to the other so quickly?" I think mob mentality has a lot to do with it. So this evening we try to put ourselves in the sandals of one of the people that is there, a member of that crowd, and how you go from being a member of a crowd to being a member of a mob. It basically comes by just being a follower. I think that's what we see this evening.

When you look at the history of Jesus' suffering and death, you get the impression that the chief priests and the leaders of the Jews, the teachers of the law, the ruling council, they kind of wanted to do this hush-hush, quickly, and not let crowds get involved. They knew Jesus was big with the crowds. They had seen the entrance on Palm Sunday. During the week, every time they tried to throw another trap in front of Jesus, he answered them with amazingly powerful words, and the people were amazed at his teaching. It seems like they wanted to do this in the middle of the night when no one was around. Then they rush Jesus over early in the morning to Pilate so that they can get his rubber stamp and get this done before the crowd gets involved. That's at least how it appears.

But Pilate, like we talked about last week, his radar going off that all of a sudden these people who hate Rome are so concerned about the honor of Caesar, he dragged his feet a little bit. He looks. He investigates. He asks questions. He sends him to Herod. He brings him back. He has him beaten. He does all these various things trying to appease the leaders of the Jews and it allows the time for a crowd to gather during this trial before Pilate. But it seems as though the leaders of the Jews were up to the task

of manipulating the crowd. You're left with the impression that they must have said, "If the people get involved, here are the things we need to do. We need to get out there and perhaps tell the people that Jesus was a blasphemer, that he was sinning against God by claiming to be God himself." He had said it in the trial the night before that he was the Son of God and they would see him coming on the clouds. Maybe they were also telling people "All he is going to do is cause us problems with the Romans and it's going to end up with the Romans crushing our temple worship. We won't have our temple. We won't have our city and they'll take all of this away from us and disband the ruling council, and we'll never reestablish the glory of David and Solomon." It seems to be that must have been some of what they used to sow the seed.

If you put yourself in the shoes of someone that's there...let's say you had heard of Jesus. You had been there before. You maybe had even seen some of his miracles. Now that day you come again and you hear about what is going on, this trial. You come and you hear these rumors about Jesus that he is a blasphemer. You hear that he's a trouble maker and he is going to cause us problems with Rome like some people had in the past. Now all of your spiritual leaders, the people you look up to, they are the ones telling you all these things. And when you look at Jesus, what do you see? You see someone bruised, bloodied and beaten. He doesn't look like someone that is going to reestablish the glory of Solomon, does he? The only guy that is sticking up for him, the only guy that is coming to his defense, if this guy truly is going to be the Messiah that gets rid of Rome, the only guy that is coming to his defense is the governor that is from Rome. He's the enemy. All your leaders, all the guys that know the Scriptures so much better than you do, they are there saying "He's the problem. Get rid of him. Crucify him."

Before you know it, there's the offer, Barabbas or Jesus, and before you know it, you've joined in, you've bitten in, the mob mentality bug has bitten you hard and you're joining in yelling "Crucify him" because you're eyes are screaming at you, "This guy isn't going to make us like David or Solomon again. He's a loser. Look at him."

So the guy that maybe you had even seen perform these miracles, you cry "Crucify him, because I don't care if he did miracles," he wasn't doing the kind of thing you expected. Basically you understood the glorious Messiah out of the Book of Psalms but you conveniently ignored the suffering Messiah that is painted in the Book of Psalms. If you were one of the mob and you became a follower, it is because you were spiritually lazy and didn't know the Scriptures. If you had read in Psalm 22, you would know this is what was supposed to happen. If you had read in Isaiah 52 and 53 or listened to it in the synagogue and called it to mind, you would have known. But sometimes it's just easier to be lazy and follow instead of being spiritual and mature and be a leader, isn't it?

So off he goes to the place of the skull. You wonder if some of the people there in the mob followed, if they heard Jesus cry out "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing," if that made them stop and think a little bit, if they were there from the sixth hour to the ninth hour when it went dark in the middle of the day, if they heard

about the curtain in the temple tearing in two from top to bottom, the earthquake that shook under your feet, hearing the reports of the people or maybe even seeing them with your own eyes, the people that rose from the dead and came back into Jerusalem...did that change their minds? Did it lead you to repent of your sin and then see Jesus as the answer for your sin of crying out crucify him? Or was it dismissed out of hand as just something else that can't be true? I have to believe that some of the mob repented, but I have to believe some of them were just hardened in their sin. That's kind of sad, isn't it?

Mob mentality...you've probably experienced it on some level in your life, haven't you? You get together with a group of people and you do something, because you're in the group, that you never would have done on your own. Maybe when you were younger you made some really foolish decisions but you went along with it because the group was doing it. Groups acting together never seem to become more intelligent, do they? Decision making seems to get worse and worse, doesn't it? But you went along because you didn't want to stick out. You didn't want to be the stick in the mud. You didn't want to speak up. But that was just when you were younger, right? You don't do that anymore, do you?

Spiritually lazy mob mentality can tear a church apart. I saw it happen. I saw it happen in a neighboring church in Minnesota where I served. At one time in this church's history it was the largest church, the largest individual congregation in the Wisconsin Synod. When I was there, they were having all kinds of problems. They had a group of people that decided the reason that their church had started shrinking was because of the doctrine of the WELS and that they had to do away with this doctrine and then people would come. There was a vocal minority that was saying this. This vocal minority was always rubbing shoulders with my members day after day in the coffee shops and at sporting events and at various things like that. So at one council meeting we talked about it. I showed them from Scripture that what this minority was saying was incorrect. They were just being spiritually lazy and were not listening to what God's Word said and were trying to be more "with it" with the times instead of being faithful to the Word of God. The men saw that and the men agreed to that. I said "You have a responsibility that the next time you are at that sporting event, the next time you are having coffee with these people in the morning, the next time that guy starts going on and on again about what is wrong with this doctrine and what is wrong with their pastors and what is wrong with their doctrine, don't just sit there silently anymore because they assume your silence is agreement with what they are doing. Your silence emboldens them to become even more boisterous, even more vociferous and even more attacking the truth of God's Word. Now that you know that this is the truth of God's Word, your responsibility as a Christian the next time you hear it is to say to them 'You're wrong. What you're saying is against the Word of God and you should really stop. And what your pastors are teaching you is correct.'" That doesn't sound like a fun way to start the morning at a coffee shop, does it?

At the next council meeting, one of my elders came back and said "Pastor, I listened to this same guy say the same thing over and over. He would always get on a roll and a

rant. I did what you said. I said 'You're wrong. Scripture says that what they are teaching you is correct and you're not on Scriptural ground.'" He said "Pastor, it was amazing. The guy shriveled up like a shrinking violet. He didn't say another word and he hasn't said anything since anytime I've been there."

Mob mentality within churches can attack doctrines. It can attack people. If you don't speak up against it, it just keeps building and building and the wave keeps growing and growing and growing. Silence really isn't acceptable because silence is understood as support by the people that are attacking someone who is faithful or attacking the Word of God. Speaking out against it is what God has called us to do. God puts us together to be Christians that are inner-connected and to be a mob, not in the negative sense, but in the good sense so that we teach one another, so that we admonish one another, so that we encourage one another, so that we show mercy to one another, so that we build one another up, so that we use our spiritual gifts to serve one another. That's why he puts us together. When a "Christian mob" works that way together, God is glorified. His body is strengthened and it serves more faithfully, more forcefully, and the Holy Spirit is unleashed among us. So you can be a spiritually lazy mob follower, or you can do the hard thing and stand up.

Here's the glorious truth. Every time that you and I have failed at this, and we have failed, at one time or another we have sinned against our God in our silence...Jesus was nailed to the cross for those sins as well as for that mob that was there that day. Those sins are taken away and we are renewed and our God looks at us and says, "I love you. I forgive you. You are mine and I'm not letting go." And that's why we do the hard thing at times. We separate from the mob and we try to stop it.