

Matthew 26:1-5
4th Midweek Service in Lent
Sermon Series: Ironies of the Passion
The Proud Ones & The Humble One

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
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When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ²“As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” ³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. ⁵“But not during the Feast,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

They couldn't be more different. In our sermon text, Matthew lets you be a fly on the wall as two different groups talk about the future. One gathers around the greatest man that has ever walked the earth and listens as he speaks once more in perfect humility. The other group is made up of a bunch of arrogant nobodies. People who would be completely forgotten if it wasn't for the man they hated.

It is nothing new. We see that dynamic all the time. You watch the Oscars as a loudmouthed reporter who seems far too proud of him or herself interviews a Hollywood icon who speaks humbly despite his accomplishments. We see the young athlete pounding his chest in celebration of himself, despite the fact that he went undrafted the year before and really hasn't been that good. And we hear the future hall of famer speak humbly about his win or loss, giving credit to teammates as he deflects the credit from himself, though he would certainly have reason to be proud of all he accomplished. It's nothing new, often the ones who are most humble have more reason to be proud than the ones who are so proud of themselves.

But no matter how many times we see it, the irony of it is offensive, isn't it? You see it on the field and you shake your head in disgust. You watch the interview on the red carpet and turn the channel almost without thinking about it. You deal with those who are proud for no reason at work and you secretly wait and hope for the day when they will be humbled. You see as people are made celebrities and yet have accomplished nothing while those who have truly accomplished something and live in humility are overshadowed by them and it disturbs us.

Consider the offensive irony in our sermon text. Settle in among Jesus and his disciples on the Mount of Olives somewhere. The Holy Son of God, the creator of the universe, the God-Man is talking with sinful man face to face. He knows all that is about to happen. He knows the pain it would bring him. He knows the pain it would bring his disciples. And he has all the power in the universe to avoid it. To reduce his enemies to ash and to show the world his glory in his power. Yet, that is not the road he would take. His is a road of humility. A road he travels not for his sake, but for yours. A road he walks submitting to this future because this is God's Will for him and what it would cost to save you. A road that would bring him hatred and ridicule and scorn and death in the most public and gruesome of ways. A road that would land him squarely beneath the wrath of God. A road he humbly submits to walk. We are a fly on the wall as he prepares his disciples for it. Never has a man had more reason to pound his chest in pride! And never has one carried himself in such selfless humility.

Then go to the house of Caiaphas and notice the stark contrast. Instead of a garden somewhere, watch as the who's who of Jerusalem meet in a palace. Instead of a spirit of humility, you can smell the stench of pride and see it staining all they do. From the way they

arrogantly presume to set the time and place when they will murder the Son of God. As if they had control of such things and God would work according to their timetable! To how they scheme to cover it all up and do it to avoid attention. What arrogance to believe that they can just control the sin that rages inside of them. As if they were sin's master rather than the other way around. And how blasphemous to plot against God as though all they had to worry about were public opinion! What arrogance to plot against the Son of God as if he would bow to their will.

It would all blow up in their face. Their carefully crafted plan would fall apart as soon as one of Jesus' own, Judas, volunteered to betray him. Then the sin they thought they controlled lashed out at the opportunity. And not only did they end up killing him during the feast, but during its highpoint! As the Passover Lamb was slaughtered and eaten in that most sacred of meals, they succumb to the raging hatred in their hearts, arrest him, and charge forward to do what they had said they would not do. Under the control of their sin, the self-righteous veneer rubs off pretty quickly. There they are on the night of the Passover lying under oath and campaigning to have an innocent man killed. There they are the next day, leaving behind worship and their sacred duties as Jews to attend a crucifixion. There they are hurling insults at him and rejoicing in death as the sky grows dark and the ground shakes beneath their feet. And if they ever stopped to take a step back, perhaps they would have noticed the foolishness of their pride as their plan went up in smoke. As the illusion of their control was shattered before all the world to see. But worse than that, how sin set them at odds with God.

There are lessons that we learn. Like them we too often live in the illusion of our control over the times and places and events of our lives. Like them we make plans as if it were us who governed the world and not God. And like them we find out pretty quickly that is not the case. God's timetable is often not our timetable. And no matter how much we plan, we cannot make his fit ours.

But perhaps that is an easier lesson to learn than the second one. It wasn't just the timing they couldn't control. They couldn't control themselves. They thought they had the will power to wait. But as soon as Judas offered them the opportunity all of their plans went out the window as they jumped at the chance to act upon their sin. They were not their own masters. Sin never shares the reigns of our hearts. Yet in pride, we often continue to believe where everyone else has failed, I will succeed. So we cozy up next to sin in our lives. We allow temptation to dwell with us, even invite it at times. There are situations that we know will tempt us to sin. But rather than running from it, we seem to try to toe the line as though falling into sin were unthinkable for someone like me.

And when we fall. When we rush off into the night after that sin we thought we had control of. We are good at trying to cover it up. Rather than being honest with ourselves and laying it before the cross where we know we have forgiveness, we follow the example of Jesus' enemies and become consumed with perception. We will do all we can to keep up appearances and to put on a good front. And even if we can fool others that doesn't solve the problem! All it does is foster an environment for sin to grow and a pride that believes I can play with sin and maintain control. And lost in it all is the offense before the one whose opinion matters most – God.

How arrogant! How foolish! You don't control sin, you die to it. And if you think you can indulge it little by little and still remain the master of your own heart. If you think you can allow it to be near you without falling into it. Finally, if you think you can keep it hidden, then it will make a fool of you as it grabs the reigns of your heart, lashes out for all to see, and leaves

destruction in its path. But worst of all, it will set you at odds with God. No different than those who plotted his murder.

No one ever had a better reason to be full of pride. After all, he is the Son of God. As such, he has perfect control over all things. He is the only one who can't receive too much credit. The only one whose glory is the purpose for all things because he has set all things into place. And there has never been a better time for him to be full of pride. This was all for him. This whole festival of the Passover had been instituted over 1500 years earlier to point people to him. All around him were ceremonies and customs that pointed people to him and what he was here to do. If ever there were a time for someone to be full of pride, it was Jesus right now.

Yet, look at Jesus' words to his disciples, "**When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."**" He could have started a riot that would have burned Jerusalem to the ground. He could have done a miracle that would have led to the people crucifying Jesus' enemies rather than he himself. Yet, he didn't use his power and control over all things to serve his own pride.

Rather, he used his power and control to serve you and I in humility. That is the beauty of what he does here. He tells them exactly when and exactly how. He knows better than Jesus' own enemies how they would kill him. Yet, he doesn't use that foreknowledge to avoid the cross, rather he uses it to prepare himself and them for it. Because this is why he came – to be our Passover Lamb. Like that lamb was slaughtered and its blood spread over the doorframes of their houses to save them from sin and death so Jesus would be strung up on a cross. His blood spilled. So that the sin that owns us could own us no longer. So you could be his.

So you could be free from your sin. You don't control sin. But Paul says in Romans 6, you do die to it. In your baptism your sinful nature died as a new you rose from the ashes. When he spoke with Nicodemus, Jesus called it a rebirth. A whole new you. A forgiven and holy Child of God – washed clean in the blood of Jesus with his perfect life draped around us. Now day after day, you don't control sin but you kill it. It rises up from within us as our sinful nature refuses to give up the fight. But then you confess it as we do here tonight and don't allow it to hide beneath the thin veneer of self-righteousness. We drag it forward for all to see and we leave it here before the cross. Where its power is destroyed and you were freed from it. It constantly tries to follow you, but that isn't who you are. You are free.

Those who are most proud often have more reason to be ashamed than those who are the most humble. It is an unfortunate irony of life. And of the cross. Yet in that irony, we find an answer to our own pride and arrogance in the one who humbly went to the cross to free us from it. Amen.