**Sermon Text for January 12, 2014**

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Psalm 51:1-12, John 18:1-11

“Let it Happen”

It has been since November 16 that we have been in our journey together through the Gospel of John. And today we come to an important episode in the life of Jesus and his followers. Most of you have been on this journey with us since April 22, 2012. We’ve heard of Jesus as the Word made flesh and who was God. We saw him perform his first miracle at a wedding in Galilee, we heard that God so loves the world. We saw him raise Lazarus and spend 5 chapters in the upper room. Isn’t that amazing about John? ¼ of the Gospel is in the upper room. No last supper, just the washing of the feet.

It has been a long journey to this evening now as they leave the safety and the comfort of the upper room and venture out into the night. Their last night with Jesus. The disciples didn’t know half the story, they still had some high expectations and some were ready to fight so that those expectations could be realized.

But for Jesus there was a somber reality of what lay ahead. This is another moment when the expectations and the desires of the disciples vary so much from what Jesus knew was going to happen and what in essence he planned on happening. Jesus was willing to let the will of God happen, while the disciples, we will see, not so much.

In both of our Scripture readings we find God laying out before us what he expects and what he wants to have happen, from the Psalm where we are encouraged to purify our hearts, to Jesus’ arrest where they are told to let it happen. That’s a challenge for us today, but let’s see if we can meet that challenge.

An experience I had in Russia consistently was not being able to get my message across, or my desires across to the person on the other side of the glass booth to the point where misunderstanding ran rampant. One time I went to visit the United Way offices and when I arrived at the security I called and she said she was coming right down. The guard asked for my documents, I gave him my passport, he gave me a pass and he said you can go through. I tried to tell him that I didn’t want to go through because the person I was meeting was meeting me there, I said something unintelligible trying to say she is coming here now, and he looked at me like I had grown a third eye. He clearly explained where the United Way Office was and that I was welcomed and encouraged to leave the lobby, I didn’t want to say I don’t want to, although I could have I thought that might have been rude.

So I set off and out into the maze of building and thirty minutes later called her again to tell her I was completely lost in her compound. She said, why didn’t you just wait, and I really didn’t have a good reason. I knew she would come but with the encouragement of the guard and my own ego thinking that I can do this, I set out to my detriment and to hers. How hard it is to let things go and stick to the plan especially when you think that the plan has been compromised and that things just aren’t going the way you’ve planned them.

In Psalm 51 we find David writing after he was called out in his sin, and realizing that he could only let God’s wrath and justice play itself out on his life. He cries out for mercy, he asks to have his sins cleansed, he calls out his unrighteousness before God, he asks not to be cast away. The sense of humility that we find in Psalm 51 would do us all well to hear and to follow. A sense of humility that ought to mark a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ disciples especially that Thursday night understood being a disciple of Jesus Christ not along these directives of the humility of the Psalm that was written in the midst of David realizing his sin, but it was a bit of a heady movement. After all, he was the one who healed Lazarus, the crowds loved him and followed him and they were his chosen ones to be by his side. They were definitely in the in crowd…for now. It really had nothing to do with truth in the inward being that calls us out as sinners, it had nothing to do with asking to have a brand new, clean heart placed within us. But rather, popularity, primacy, and some ego mixed in as well.

Jesus and his disciples set off from the edge of Jerusalem to cross the Kidron Valley, Kidron which means dark, to go to a place where they had been before, where they had gone to pray many times before. They were no strangers to this garden, so verse 2. The most meaningful lents I experienced were in Israel in 1999 and then again in 2011. We had a chance to cross this valley and walk up to the garden of Gethsemane which is perched on the side of the Mount of Olives. It wasn’t hard during that walk to image as you make your way up through these gnarled ancient olive trees the disciples singing after the last supper to go there together, unaware of what was going to happen next.

It wasn’t hard to imagine the disciples standing there in the dark watching a sea of lanterns coming toward them with Judas among the crowd leading the way. It states here that 600 soldiers came to take Jesus. You can understand why in Matthew he states to them I’ve been in the temple preaching and teaching all this time when you could have easily taken me and so now you come after me as if I were a common criminal? Things were not going as planned if you were a disciple of Jesus. Things were not going as planned. It might be best if we jump in and turn things back on track. We can’t let this happen.

John doesn’t have Jesus say these words, but rather just a few very specific words. We see that Jesus takes the initiative and moves forward and showing that he is in control and that he knows what is going to happen next and that he is going to let it happen regardless, he asks: “Whom are you looking for?” What a question. Jesus of Nazareth, they respond. I am, Jesus responds back. Ego Eimi, Where have you heard that statement before?

Remember Moses and the burning bush? Whom shall I say has sent me? I am. This was what God was called. The soldiers get it, they fall to the ground. All throughout Scripture we see that when people are faced with the glory of the presence of God they fall to their face. Nothing routine happens when you are confronted by God. Nothing ritualistic or forced. Paul on the road to Damascus, Daniel when speaking with God, John as he begins to write Revelation, the shepherds quake in fear when confronted with the angels.

When was the last time we approached God with a reverence and humility that causes us to fear, to fall on our knees because of the awesomeness of God? It isn’t the proper thing after all. We so infrequently speak of the awesomeness of God because it is easier to point to a watered down love that doesn’t really change anything.

These secular, non-believing soldiers came face to face with Jesus and fall to the ground…twice. Whom are you looking for? We are probably not comfortable looking for a God who can shake us to the core of our being that he would demand any type of change in our lives so that we could reflect as Psalm 51 states a contrite heart and a penitent spirit.

What are we looking for in Christ? Probably not so much that it would knock us off our feet. Maybe just enough to be a challenge but we’ve had enough change in our lives these past months and years, that I’m looking for the Jesus who can make my life easier, not harder. I need to keep my feet on the ground right now. Certainly not a Christ who would make me confront my sin and turn my life into one of justice, kindness, and humility. That takes work!

So Peter only saw the God that he was looking for and that he had created in his own mind and that he had built up disappear before his eyes with the coming of the soldiers. Jesus, we are going to take these guys down aren’t we? We can do it. Peter saw Jesus coming to bring a military reign, anything less is not acceptable to God. Here let me help and get the ball rolling and he cuts off the ear Malchus, the king. Impulsive, rash violent not quite justice, kindness, and humility. But he was trying to help and getting way ahead of himself.

How could Peter be wrong? Jesus chastises Peter and says are you going to prevent me from drinking the cup I must drink? What is this cup? Scripture references in Isaiah the cup referring to the wrath of God. Jesus knew he would have to undergo the punishment of the sin of humanity which was the wrath of God in just a short while. A punishment we couldn’t imagine and quite frankly he was not looking forward to. But that is what our God does.

Peter’s mistake was that he thought Jesus had lost control of the situation because who in their right mind could let it end like this? But Jesus has been in control all along: from letting Judas go and betray him, to stepping out and meeting the guards and protecting his disciples, to making Peter step away from one of the potentially biggest mistakes of his life.

So often the Jesus that we want doesn’t act the way we want him to. He doesn’t answer prayer right away, he let’s too many good people suffer, we think he has lost control. Maybe you know that Jesus. So we try to take steps to ensure a victory for him our way, let the good guys win by turning our back on justice, kindness, and humility. Jesus is in command, always has been, and always will be. It just might be Thursday night and we think things are spinning out of control. Just let Jesus take over and show you the way out, and you will be able to see clearly in just a little while, unless you insist on doing things your own way. Jesus is in control even down to his drinking the bitter cup.

Today as we live out our lives striving to follow God’s commands, commands we can be sure that God’s plans are being carried out and if we allow him to let it happen, then we will indeed be much better off. Amen.