

# Sermon Text for March 17, 2024

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*Isaiah 50:4-9, Matthew 26:47-56*

*Jesus is arrested*

We find ourselves today in the last of our sermon series in Matthew 26. So far throughout our journey in Lent together we have seen Jesus' presence changes us when a woman washes Jesus' feet with costly ointment. We have seen Jesus is among us with the Lord's Supper. We have seen Jesus acts in Matthew 25 with the judgment of those who did and those who did not feed, clothe, visit, care for. We have seen Jesus in agony as he prayed in the garden last week and now today, finally, Jesus is arrested.

I pray that you have grown in your relationship with Jesus over this lent, that Jesus is not just a name you understand but a person you love. Today we find Jesus arrested. We have seen over history many people who have been arrested for doing the right thing what John Lewis would call good trouble. Not everyone who is arrested or is charged criminally is a hero, quite the opposite, right? But here we see that those who are arrested for God's sake, clearly for God's sake, are in good company. They would be people like Ghandhi, Rosa Parks, MLK, Nelson Mandela, Navalny.

What they all have in common is that they were all arrested, and they were all arrested for the sake of the greater good, not for their own profit or their own delusional plans. They were all able to put their own personal self-interest and self-preservation behind them for the better good. They were willing to sacrifice the present trusting that the future would be brighter because of their arrest.

Jesus is arrested today and the takeaway that we should receive is understanding that in all things of our life, God cares so much and he has a plan, even in the most difficult circumstances. If we are willing to submit to the will of God, even in the face of something that seems impossible to get out of, God's plan is for our future good, or as Paul says in Romans, that God is indeed working all things for good for those who trust in the Lord. We have to believe that in order for our faith to have any impact on our life. Let's read.

## **READ**

Our first reading in Isaiah 50 is described as the suffering servant and it is in those places where we see a commonality between this suffering servant and our Savior. All over Isaiah we see these Scriptures which describes the prophet as suffering for the sake of the kingdom of God, and being willing to suffer so that God's purposes would be carried out. There are some very

direct links between these suffering servant Scriptures and what our Savior experienced in his life in his suffering as well.

Look at vs.6, (read), this is the good trouble and the hardship that the author faces as a result of doing the will of God. If you think doing the will of God makes your life easier, this sermon will completely dissuade you from that thought. Instead Isaiah says that when you follow the will of God you will face certain short term hardship.

As you read vs. 5 and vs. 7 you will see the steadfastness of the author, in the midst of this time in my life I did not turn backward. I didn't look for an easy way out which might have compromised my faith or might not have reflected godly action. I set my face like flint...I continued to not return evil for evil, but continued to try to overcome evil with good.

Isaiah describes a scenario where things are going poorly and yet the prophet continues to believe that God will help him and continues to act in a way that is consistent with the Gospel. That is our challenge, isn't it? When things are going poorly do we pivot away from God and look to make things happen in our way which takes us away from the way in which God would want us to act just to reap benefits in the short term? Or do we take the long range view and know and trust that God is at work behind the scenes, or as vs.7 believe that the Lord helps me and that is God's purpose in our life, to help me. Do you believe that God is doing everything possible to help you?

Let's go to Jesus' arrest in Matthew 26, can you imagine any worse reality for Jesus than being arrested in front of your loyal followers for doing God's will? Judas, described as the betrayer here, has a plan as well. It is clearly not God's plan, but he does have a plan, and we have seen him carrying it out at the last supper and now it comes to fruition. It is game time and time to put the plan into motion. He has it all worked out with a signal included because of the chaos of the scene in the garden with so many pilgrims and people milling around for the Passover. This special signal was going to be a kiss, a kiss of greeting, the person that Judas kisses is the one that those who were sent by the priests should arrest.

Let's talk about this kiss of Judas. First of all, it is really hard for us to understand why Judas would kiss Jesus if we have never lived in a Mediterranean culture. I lived in Italy for 13 years and those last 4 years as an adult we would greet each other, men and women, with a kiss. The kiss in those cultures was like a handshake for men, but it was a kiss. It was like a hug for women, but it was a kiss. It is such a part of the culture that it is a sign of respect and friendship, and there are zero sexual connotations to this greeting. There is about as much sexual connotation to a kiss as there is to a handshake, zero.

When I began serving as a pastor in Florida after our four years in Italy the first Sunday that I greeted people, you know like I do here every Sunday, I did what I had done in Italy, where I had just served. As people were coming out I leaned over and kissed on both cheeks both men and women, and let me tell you, it was not well received. I didn't even think about, that's how you greeted people and said hello and goodbye. I mean after all Paul commands it in II Corinthians 13:12 where he tells us to greet each other with a holy kiss. I was just following Scripture.

For Judas, this kiss was a very common event for a very uncommon evening. The plan of Judas was being carried out. In vs.50 we see that Jesus understands what is happening and is fully aware and willing to follow God's plan, even though Judas understood it as his plan. Jesus approaches it in a way that would be helpful for us to approach those times that we find ourselves in our lives as wondering what should be our response. He basically says: you have to let it happen in order for it to happen. You have to let the will of God happen in order for the will of God to happen.

But Jesus' disciples don't see this as part of God's plan. John tells us in his Gospel that it was Peter who takes out his sword to defend his master. But Jesus says no. God's plan never involves violence. He says that earlier in his teachings on the sermon on the Mount in chapter 5 of Matthew. God's plan only involves loving your enemy. Again this is something we are not used to hearing and following, that in the midst of these types of situations, we are called to look for how do we love our enemy even more? This is not about escape, this is about victory and the only way we can achieve this victory is to lose this one battle because then we are set up to win the war against sin and death.

He then turns his attention and addresses his disciples, and Judas by default, and the crowd that had gathered as well, even though this looks and feels terrible, God is at work, and according to what he says in vs.54, this is actually part of God's plan. Like Joseph tells his brothers, you meant harm to me by throwing me into the pit and selling me into slavery, but God was able to make a plan where it would result in the salvation of his people.

It takes an enormous amount of faith to believe that God is at work when you are in the pit, or when you have hands laid upon you and you are arrested. When you find yourself in the worst time of your life, it is hard to believe God is at work, it takes faith to believe that. The arrest of Jesus is such a time, and Jesus was able to tell his followers, just trust that God is at work. Salvation is at hand. It is Friday, but Sunday is coming. That is not easy. It is hard to see the glory of Sunday when you are knee deep in Friday.

Some of us feel like we are living constantly in Friday. Others of us feel like every day is Sunday. Most of us are probably somewhere in between where we have seasons of Fridays that are really difficult and seasons of Sundays where God is so present and we see him clearly at work. It takes a lot of faith to see God at work at either ends of this spectrum. On Fridays we wonder if God is present. On Sundays we often give ourselves the credit for how things are going.

What we do here in this church is to try to bring people to a closer walk with Jesus who assures us that His plan is being carried out in our lives, even in the most difficult of times. The result of Jesus' arrest was the fulfilment of Zechariah 13:7, strike the shepherd that the sheep may be scattered. The disciples were not able to trust God's plan so they despaired. We know Jesus brings them back but this was for our sake so that when we find ourselves desperate we can continue to trust knowing that God is at work. Amen.