



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

March 10, 2019

"The Empathetic Lord" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

Pastor Dan Chun

Mark 14:53-65 *They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together.*

Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death, but they did not find any.

Many testified falsely against Him, but their statements did not agree.

Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against Him: "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'"

Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"

But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.

Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded Him, struck Him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took Him and beat Him.

The title of this message is The Empathetic Lord. If we want a God in whom we would fully dedicate our lives, we would want a God like Jesus, not only because He is powerful and kind and forgiving and understanding, but also because He would be empathetic to all of the challenges we would face here on earth. He would feel our pain as well as our joy.

Ash Wednesday last week ushered in the season of Lent, which is the 40 days leading up to Easter.

And in this one passage that leads up to Easter morning, we will find clues of an empathetic God in Jesus.

Our story today finds that Jesus is unfairly arrested, is a victim of the injustice of the court system, is falsely accused, and is physically assaulted. He is abandoned by friends in whom He has poured His life for three years.

On this one night, Jesus has gone through much of what you yourself have experienced. We can feel abandoned by a friend or falsely accused by a relative or colleague. Maybe we have been physically abused or beaten up. Maybe the court system has let us down. Maybe someone even used religion against us. Maybe someone doubted what God has called you to do. Maybe, like Jesus, you're facing possible death not from an execution but from a scary medical report.

All of these elements are in this one episode.

We can see that when we go through these challenges and hurts, Jesus would be an empathetic Lord. Whatever you are going through Jesus understands. He's real, you know.

Last week Chris gave a great sermon that led us up to this Bible passage.

In review, in his sermon we heard how Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was full of action.

We saw the literal kiss of death from Judas on Jesus' cheek, then a fight during a late night prayer meeting in which Peter pulls out a sword – why a fisherman has a sword at a late night prayer meeting we don't know, unless he was planning to prepare some sashimi for a late night snack. But no, Peter, using maybe an enlarged Masamoto sashimi knife, slices off an ear of the servant of the high priest. Hey, it was dark – no street lights, just some torches; Peter perhaps missed and got the ear instead of the head.

The story ends with a tussle, and Jesus is arrested while the Temple Police try to grab one of the disciples, who we think is the author of this Gospel named Mark. As Mark is running away, the Temple guards grab his robe, which turned out to be history's first tear-away jersey, and all of Mark's clothes are ripped off in the escape, and Mark runs off naked!

Clearly, Chris gets all of the fun passages to preach on.

But in today's passage we find a number of characters all so intriguing. My question is: Who are you in this story?

Each character tells a different spiritual story. Let's go verse by verse. We begin with verse 54. It says:

Peter followed Jesus at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

Our first character is the apostle **Peter**, the fisherman. Peter, who watches Jesus from a distance, but doesn't get involved. He tried to defend Jesus or himself with a sword, but then ran away. Was once close to Jesus, but now distanced.

Maybe that's you. You feel a bit distanced from Jesus. Once you were close or tried to get close, but now feel more distant. And the reason might be, like Peter, you thought Jesus was something that He isn't.

He perhaps didn't perform like you thought He would. You thought He would protect you from all pain. And you are fighting for your life in the Garden. You thought Jesus would be like a Marvel super hero who would use His divine super powers to guard you, but you got hurt or are in danger in your health, in your finances, or in your relationships. Maybe a church once hurt you and you have been in self-exile for a while, wondering if the church or if Jesus is even for real. Is Jesus weaker than we thought?

Or maybe you worked really hard in ministry and you thought Jesus would reward you for that. You thought it was transactional: "I work hard, then I get blessed more and God loves me more. I paid my sweat equity, but I still have pain in my life. It didn't seem to work the way I thought."

So we distance ourselves. Close, but not too close, to Jesus.

And here is Peter at a fireplace with some of the guards who were ironically like the ones who took Jesus away.

So if you are here today, kinda checking out Jesus from a distance ... maybe having seen a miracle or two like Peter in the past, but now wondering, asking "Are you for real or not," ... know that you are welcomed here, and we understand your questions. They are good questions.

How could mere Temple guards take Jesus away when He is the all-powerful God? How could pain or violence enter into my life?

Now on to our next group of characters: **the Sanhedrin**. Let's look at the next verses:

Mark 14:55-59 *The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against Him, but their statements did not agree.*

Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against Him:

We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'

Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

The Sanhedrin are the 23 or the 70 rabbis, not sure how many on that specific night, who sat as a tribunal to judge spiritual matters.

These are the ones who came up with the tradition and the culture that if you feel distant from God, then you can only get closer to Him through rules, regulations, and rituals. It was a "works-only" kind of religion.

So when Jesus came and spoke of mercy and grace, it was a threat to their religious legalistic system because it controlled the people. And that's why they wanted to kill Jesus.

Maybe there is a little, legalistic Sanhedrin in us all.

Maybe deep down inside we might think if I do more maybe God will love me more by following rituals. Maybe if I follow the rules more God will then love me more.

It was a shocking gospel that Jesus said, "I already love you to the fullest. Don't need to do anything. Just follow me. And you will do great things out of love."

Just as a child shouldn't have to work to gain a parent's love, so know you are fully loved as you are by our Heavenly Father.

Jesus is saying, "Nothing you can do will make me love you more. I am willing to be unfairly treated and sacrificed so that you might know of my love. And know that I have taken away a cosmic curse off of your life called sin so that you can live a fulfilled life here on earth and in heaven."

Maybe some of us in this room have heard false claims – myths about Jesus all our lives.

For one: That He was just a man — a good, exceptionally moral man, but just a man.

Or maybe we heard that He never claimed to be God.

Or maybe we think that I can do anything I want. I can sin all I want and Jesus will forgive me. So I will purposely sin, that grace may abound.

Or maybe we can think if I follow Jesus I will be rich.

Or if I follow Jesus I will never have pain or injustice.

Or all roads lead to God, so I don't need to follow Jesus.

Those are all false testimonies about who Jesus is and what He offers us. Our Bible passage today talks about the false testimony given about Jesus. Over the centuries there has been much false testimony about Jesus.

For example, that Jesus hates gays and lesbians. Or that Jesus wanted blacks to be slaves or that the Ku Klux Klan with their crosses means Jesus endorses

them. Or that Jesus thinks women must be subordinate in all ways.

People today carry many misconceptions about Jesus. Sometimes we take a tiny part of a Bible passage instead of the whole of the truth of what Jesus calls us to and it blocks us to see what Jesus is saying. Like an inoculation that gives us a bit of antibodies, part of the truth prevents more of understanding the full story of Jesus.

The Sanhedrin was always trying to prove that Jesus was *not* God. They were always trying to find evidence that Jesus was not the God they wanted.

We can be like that at times. Sometimes when things go wrong, just when there is some prick of pain, we are so quick to whine and complain: "Oh, that pain now shows that Jesus is not God or that He doesn't love me."

The passage says "yet the Sanhedrin's false testimony did not agree." We can hear all of these different voices in our head.

Or whenever we look at something from just one side, we will get a garbled, warped point of view.

Yes, things have gone wrong in the Church of the world, and some very bad things have been done in the name of Jesus. We can read of horrible atrocities in the Catholic and Protestant churches, but it would be a false witness to say that is the whole picture – as any human institution can be tainted by sin.

Philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote, “Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made.”

But it is also out of the Church and Christians that came such great organizations as World Vision and Compassion International and the Red Cross and Wycliffe and InterVarsity and YWAM and the YMCA and the YWCA, as well as two major organizations who fight sex trafficking – Agape International Missions and International Justice Mission.

We have looked at Peter and the Sanhedrin. Now let’s look at the third character in the story: **the High Priest**, who confronts Jesus Himself about all of these false accusations. And Jesus’ response to the High Priest might surprise you.

Mark 14:61 *But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked Him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”*

Mark 14:62 *“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.*

First Jesus gave no answer. He just remained silent. In His divine wisdom He knew that at some point if people could not understand His three years of ministry in their midst and if they are going to twist everything He says, then silence is the best thing.

When people unfairly accuse you, sometimes silence is the best thing.

But when the High Priest asks Jesus factually “Are you God, the son of the Blessed One,” Jesus says, “I am,” which is the same name that God used when God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. I am that I am. I am God.

In essence, He was saying: “I will be sitting at the right hand of God the Father for all time, and you will see that at the end of your life.”

When the high priest heard that, he tore his clothes, which signified in those ancient times an incredible stress and displeasure.

We first see the tearing of clothes in the Bible in the Old Testament when Reuben saw that his brother Joseph was sold into slavery. And then later when Joseph’s father Jacob realizes Joseph is gone, he too rends his clothes. Why? Because in an agricultural society, clothes were expensive and very time-consuming to make. So, when people chose to tear their clothes, it showed how truly upset they were; so much so that they would damage their expensive possession.

Here the High Priest rips his cloths and says, “We don’t need any more witnesses!”

There are times when we might identify with the High Priest because we are near the point where we say, “I don’t need any more witnesses that Jesus is God. I have had it up to here. My pain is so great! I have felt let down by Him!” And I

would say to those people — be careful that you have not been listening to a lot of false witnesses who have said things about Jesus that Jesus never said.

Sometimes the truth gets distorted. But even though the truth of Jesus was distorted by the Sanhedrin and the High Priest, Jesus said that He will still come back for us. “I’ll be the Son of Man” – His favorite name for Himself – meaning “I am God but I am with you. I’m coming back to get you. I will not abandon you. Look for Me someday. I’ll be there on the clouds of heaven.”

He did not mean the regular clouds in the sky, but the clouds of shekinah glory. It’s the very essence of the glory and being of God.

So who are you in the story? Are you Peter, who was once close to God but are now distanced from Him? Or are you part of the Sanhedrin, who’s so stuck in religious practices? Or are you the High Priest, who, in spite of all the proof God has shown you, is blinded by your false expectations of Him?

Let’s pause for a moment and think about that.

And then sadly, tragically, sadistically, the story continues with this next verse in the passage:

Mark 14:65 *Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him.*

To beat our Lord so viciously and then so sarcastically tell Him to prophesy who hit Him, was appalling, cruel, and unjust. And if that was not enough, the guards took Jesus out and, rather than let Him heal from that beating, they beat Him to a bloody pulp.

When I read of this, I think it is like a man in an office in a burning high-rise building who is trying to tell his colleagues that there is only one way out. He had learned from the Master Architect of the building that if there is a fire, go down a certain hallway and stairway.

So he said, "Follow me down this hallway." And his office mates ask, "Who do you think you are – God?" "No really," the man replied. "Please go this way. Follow me."

And his colleagues replied, "Our tradition is that we take the elevator down not the stairwell. That's the practice. We do that every day when we go out for lunch or leave at the end of the day. Plus it's faster."

But the man says – "No, don't take the elevator – you will die. The elevator will take you right into a lake of fire. Follow me. Take the stairwell with me. Take my path."

But incredulously because they felt he was such a nuisance, they beat him up and had security take him out into the hallway and beat him again to a bloody pulp.

The man who was trying to save them was seen as a crazy nuisance who thought he was their savior.

That is what this story is like. Jesus is trying to tell us to follow Him. Let's not listen to the lies about Him; just follow Him.

Now you heard or saw that the title of this sermon is The Empathetic Lord. Whatever pain or misunderstanding or life's questions you are facing, run to our empathetic Lord Jesus, instead of running away from Him.

You have heard about all of the beatings and pain and injustice He has gone through. He knows what it is like when you suffer. He feels your pain. And He can be our Lord, God, friend. His arms are reaching out to us.

Years ago, *Time* magazine had an interview with JoAnne Terrell, an American African writer. She suffered a life of poverty. But worse than that, she suffered a life of violence. Her mother was killed by her boyfriend. When JoAnne studied the death of Jesus, she began having flashbacks of her mother's death—the bed mattress soaked in blood and her mother's bloodied fingerprints on the wall. If anyone had a right to say "Jesus, I can't follow you," it probably would have been JoAnne Terrell.

In Tim Keller's book *The Reason for God*, he quotes her and then comments on her saying, "'I had to find a connection between my mom's story and my story and Jesus' story,' she said. She found it in understanding the cross – namely that Jesus did not only suffer for us, but with us. He knew what it was like (literally)

to be under the lash and refuse to be cowed by those in power, and to pay for it with His life. He voluntarily took His place beside those who are without power and who were suffering from injustice."

As John Stott wrote, "I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?" [*Reason for God* by Tim Keller, 2008 p. 195]

In a *Time* magazine interview, JoAnne Terrell said she realized that "Jesus not only suffered for us, but He suffered with us. He knows what it's like to stand up to those in power and pay for it with his life. He knows what it's like to be a victim of a corrupt judicial system."

This is the God who suffers not only for you but *with* you, the God who was assaulted and lynched and abandoned and who was depressed on the cross ... for you.

If I wanted a God, I would want one who knows and feels my pain, and yet calls me to strength and hope and to help others. It's the message of the Hope of Easter that is coming.

So know today, the Lord is with you. He is for you. He knows your challenges and pain and He offers His hand that has a nail hole in His wrist to say, "I empathize and I am with you. Follow Me. And let's make the world a better place."

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Note: Sunday sermon texts, as well as audio and video recordings of sermons, also are available at fpchawaii.org by clicking the eSermons tab.