

Sermon- Powerless Yet In Control

Scripture: John 18:1-11

Sunday, October 4, 2020

After meditating over 5 Sundays on Jesus' high priestly prayer, it is time for us to enter into his journey to the cross. This is a journey that starts with his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. The story is a familiar one. But every Gospel has a different emphasis and a different set of details. But we do know this that the night before he was arrested, Jesus went to an often frequented spot to pray. John tells us it was across the Kidron valley. Mark and Mathew tell us, the place was called the Garden of Gethsemane. This was an olive grove. Just as an aside olive trees live an average of 400-600 years. But many kinds of olive trees live much longer than that even. The olive trees in the present day garden of gethsemane have been dated to be 900 years old, but there is an olive tree in Bethlehem that is 5000 years old. Just imagine that! It was 3000 years old when Jesus was born and it would be something he saw and enjoyed, I imagine. So maybe that's why Jesus went to this Olive grove across the Kidran valley to pray because it gave him some comfort. Of course that is 100% speculation on my part and has no theological significance so let's move on. After he finished, a detachment of Roman soldiers led by a commander came to arrest Jesus. Now in the Greek you have the terms used by the Roman army and from that what we are being told is that this would typically have been about 600 soldiers. It is not certain if all 600 soldiers came to arrest Jesus, but it certainly was a few hundred for sure. So that is certainly a show of power. It is certainly intimidating when you have three cop cars pulling over a driver so imagine what it was like for Jesus and his 11. But we are also told that these soldiers came with blazing torches, lanterns and weapons. John mentions this detail to point out the irony that these soldiers come with torches to arrest the Light of the world and they come

with weapons to arrest the prince of peace. When we human beings mess with our God, it is so ripe with irony and John loves to highlight these for us.

We also know that Judas is the one that betrays Jesus with a kiss on the cheek and so he is the one that brings the Roman soldiers to Jesus' favorite spot. But there is more irony in this scene. Because here it is not the Romans who ask where Jesus is, it is Jesus who steps forward and asks what the Romans want. While Judas is the one designated to identify Jesus, it is Jesus who either before or after the kiss self identifies as the one they are looking for. So either Jesus confirms Judas' sign or Judas confirms Jesus' declaration. Because if Jesus did not confirm his identity, or if some other follower faked it, it could have easily confused the soldiers. After all how would they know if Judas has telling the truth? Anyway Jesus clearly identifies himself with the words "I Am He". And when he does that, all the soldiers literally draw back and fall to the ground. That is the kind of power they felt from that one statement from Jesus. If he were to reveal a small glimpse of his power, he would not have to call down angels for his protection. Jesus himself says that this was always an option for him, but even that step would not really be necessary as you just saw happen.

Then in verse 8 Jesus tells the soldiers, since I am the one you are looking for, take me but let these others go, referring to his 11. Jesus is the one getting arrested and yet he is the one giving the commands. As you know this is exactly what happened. None of his followers were arrested along with Jesus. That is pretty remarkable in itself, don't you think?

Now in verse 10 you have Peter who in his usual impulsive, emotional and a little out of step with reality self does something really stupid. He draws his sword and cuts off the right ear of the Malchus, who is the servant of the high priest. This move could have sparked a massacre by the Roman soldiers right there, but what happens next is incredibly astounding. The Gospel of Luke reports that Jesus takes the ear and heals

Malchus right there. This of course has everybody stunned. But I want to point out that John is the only one who names of both Peter and Malchus in this incident. There is an important reason behind it. You see John was written about 90 AD, after considerable time passed. And because of that many things would have happened in the early church where the gospels were being read. You see Malchus was most likely named in John because by the time of the writing of John, Malchus would have been a name that meant something to John's readers and hearers. That is because Malchus was a well known church leader by then.

When you meditate on the events of Jesus' arrests, something very interesting jumps out. You see the effect of worldly power on Jesus. You see at that moment of Jesus' arrest, there are possibly 600 Roman soldiers and their commander all of whom are fully armed. You have the temple priests and their guards and servants also armed. In fact what you are seeing is a wall of military power, and political power come to face off with Jesus and his followers. And what is the effect of all that power on Jesus? Nothing actually. Nothing that happened to Jesus at his arrest was because of the effect of the power of the temple authorities or the Roman soldiers. On the contrary what you see is the effect of Jesus' power on the soldiers and Malchus and even on Judas actually.

So the question is, how is Jesus not affected by all that earthly power and how does Jesus have such a powerful effect on the soldiers and Malchus? Well that is a very good question. Well, the title of my sermon is "powerless, yet in control". Jesus seemed powerless when he got arrested. Yet he seems in absolute control of the situation. He did not have any political power or military or financial power. But the fact is that Jesus was not powerless, he simply was tapping a different power source. Jesus' power source was from heaven. Everybody else was tapping into earthly sources of power and earthly powers of power are really sources of trouble. You see all of Jesus' earthly ministry you can argue was him trying to show people how to tap into this different kind of power.

Why? Because the power source you use has a profound effect on you and your actions. All sources of power are not equal. Let me illustrate this point with a story from my growing up years. Many years ago as a kid growing up in the big crowded city of Mumbai, one of the best memories I had was our summer vacations where we made trips to our native place in a village in Kerala. Now this was a distance of about 650 miles. In those days it meant a train journey. Now the train in those days would take three days to make that distance. That was a long time but the journey was part of the experience. I remember sitting by the window and watching the landscape rush in the opposite direction and trying to get a glimpse of the engine pulling us along whenever the trains curved and you could see it. In the early days, the engines pulling the train were actually coal powered steam engines. And as you sat in those trains the smoke that came out of the coal burning process was so great that we could be covered with fine particles of soot from head to toe. Gradually the coal engines got replaced with diesel engines and while they too emit smoke it was a much cleaner burn and you arrived at your destination much cleaner. The local trains were all electric and those trains you never have to worry about soot. But the kind of power source the engines used made a difference in how we looked when we arrived at our destination. The kind of power source we tap into has a direct impact on our actions and our lives. The fact my friends is that is dirty power and clean power. Let's think about these two kinds of power in our lives for a minute.

Let's look at the dirty power first. Dirty power is the power that comes from the world's system that is ruled by Satan himself. Dirty power is political power, military power, financial power or even sexual power to name a few. All these kinds of power are linked to the evil in this world and the Bible is always warning us to not plug into this worldly power. In 1 John 2:15 and 16 says, "***Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father^[d] is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from***

the Father but from the world.” The “world” here is being used in the sense of the power that the world has on us and the power that the world promises to give us. You have heard it said that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. Well that phrase is not directly from the Bible but it very much could be because that is what 1 John 2:15 is saying. There is another verse that Mennonites will recognize that comes from the beatitudes Matt 5:5 which says, **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth”**. The “meek” are not necessarily people who do not have any earthly power. The meek are people those who choose not to exercise or depend on earthly power. What’s the problem with earthly power? The problem with earthly power is that earthly power tends to be exercised in self-interested. Earthly power focuses on maintaining and increasing one’s earthly power. And in the process it tramples over the interests of those who have less power. Earthly power is like a coal engine. It does take you places but it will make your outside and inside filthy in the process.

On the other hand, Jesus’ entire earthly ministry was about pointing people to a different power source. The power source that He uses. The power of our heavenly Father. The power of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. There are three things that happen when you are plugged into your heavenly power source.

Firstly, when you are plugged into the power source you will be able to overcome the opposition you will face from all kinds of earthly power. Remember Jesus said, **“Blessed are the meek because they will inherit the earth”**. Well, the word inherit gives you a hint that it is not any time soon. Before the meek can inherit the earth there is a lot of work to be done by God’s people. They will have to shine the light of God’s witness in a very hard and hostile environment. And in that process the world and Satan will push back at you in such a way that you will be tempted to use worldly power rather than heavenly power, just like Jesus himself was tempted. And along with the temptation of using worldly power, the world will also put up barriers between you and your heavenly

power source. And one of the barriers is that in the secular world to tell people that you depend on Jesus is not OK. This world makes the name of Jesus shameful to utter. This world makes Jesus values seem stupid to live by. The flesh and Satan will make Jesus Kingdom values seem impossibly hard to execute. But take heart because Jesus said, I have overcome the world. That means Jesus has overcome the barriers for us to access heavenly power in a big way. And not just any barriers but the biggest barriers, the barriers created by even sin and death. And because Jesus has overcome the biggest barriers to accessing heavenly power in this world, with Jesus' help we can overcome any barrier or opposition worldly power places in front of us. With Jesus power we can overcome the world.

Secondly, with Jesus power we can make Jesus visible in this world. Honestly, when you look at the news and see chaos and confusion, calamities and disease, evil people prospering and decent people being exploited, it is hard to see the signs of God and his goodness in the world. But Jesus Christ in Acts 1:8 says you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and even to the ends of the earth. This is a powerful promise. It may not feel like it is something that is occurring but when you and I immerse ourselves in scripture, spend our time communing with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and simply obeying God's word to us then God's promise is that we will be His witnesses. That means we will get the power to make God visible no matter how dark and difficult things get around us.

Thirdly, Jesus power heals, where the world's power only destroys. You see this playing out at the time of Jesus' arrest, right? Peter exercises the power of his physical strength and his worldly weapon on Malchus. What was the result? Malchus' ears were cut off. Remember Malchus was the servant of the high priest? Now remember there is an Old Testament law which states that people who has some deformity or disease where not permitted to serve in the temple. So if left as is, Malchus would not only have lost his

ear but he would have lost his job and possibly not been able to go to the temple even for worship. That would mean losing even his community. Fortunately, Jesus was not going to let that happen even if **He** was about to be crucified. So he stops the whole proceeding to heal his ear. Jesus' touch made the ear whole again. When the world's power is on display, people get trampled upon, lives are destroyed and sometime it even results in death. When God's power is on display, people experience love and relationship and healing and wholeness.

God's power enables us to overcome the opposition of the world's power. God's power enables us to make God visible in a fallen world. God's power heals, while the world's power steals, kills and destroys.

Our job then is to imitate Christ in the power source He used to live his life and handle the events of his arrest and beyond. Remember he did not try and exercise the worldly power available to him but chose instead to focus on using God's power to do God's will. In the process he overcame the tense environment of his arrest to bring healing, peace and eventually life transformation to those around him and in a few year that healing reached across the whole world. May we both individually and together imitate Christ in this way. Not exercising the worldly power but instead leaning on power from above to do God's will and bringing a piece of God's kingdom into this world. Let us pray.