

St Mark's Lutheran Church
Good Friday
Pastor Ben Pfeiffer
John 18-19

Introduction

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our sermons for Holy Week will focus on the theme of 'The Finality of Easter,' how definitive and decisive these events are in our lives of faith. Last night we looked at Jesus' final meal, today we look at his final moments and on Sunday his final victory. Let us pray.

Final Moments

How do you imagine your final moments? Probably not like Jesus' final moments. Most people imagine they will die at an old age, peacefully, in their sleep, perhaps with a few loved ones nearby. Some people have more grandiose plans. Some people don't think about it much. Some people probably think about it too much.

The reality is that most of us won't choose the day or hour or circumstances of our death, and neither did Jesus. He simply submitted to the will of God for him, whatever that would look like. He prayed, "*not my will, but yours be done*" (Luke 22:42). There is a great deal of movement in Jesus' final moments, and with each one, an increase in intensity and emotion and the human interactions that take place. These scenes show us both the best and worst of humanity.

Last Supper to High Priest

From the Last Supper, Jesus moves to Gethsemane, where Judas arrives shortly after with the detachment of soldiers. They come with lanterns and torches and weapons, like they are on a witch hunt. Jesus speaks to them openly and plainly. "*Whom are you looking for?*" "*I am he!*" "*Let these others go.*" Jesus keeps his head, which is more we can say for Simon Peter, who takes a swing at someone else's. Peter goes into fight mode, while Jesus refuses too.

From Gethsemane, it is off to the high priest, for the first in a series of hearings. This begins the handballing of Jesus back and forth, from the soldiers to Annas, Annas to Caiphas, Caiphas to Pilate, Pilate to the crowd. Everybody wants him and nobody wants him. And while Jesus undergoes this line of questioning inside the headquarters, Peter undergoes a separate line of questioning outside. While Jesus speaks honestly and truthfully, Peter denies even knowing him. The cock crows.

Fight or flight. Why do we do it? Peter moves from one to other in a matter of moments. Lashing out then cowering away. Too forceful then too fearful. Too aggressive then too passive. And it's not just him. These are very deep human instincts that we seem to reverberate between, and each can be as unhelpful as the other! Jesus isn't the only one on trial here. The human heart and human psyche and human race, with all its troublesome attitudes and attributes, is also being held up to the microscope.

High Priest to Pilate

From the courtyard, it is off to Pilate's headquarters, which is like going from a church disciplinary hearing to the local magistrate court. I am not sure which one I would rather! There is a tension here between church and state. There is a tension here between different priorities and different modes of operating. The religious leaders see Jesus as their greatest problem. Pilate doesn't really see the problem. "Sure, take him yourselves and try him. What does it have to do with me?"

This is where things start to escalate further. This discussion of kingdoms, of power, of truth. This collision of worldviews. This admission from the religious leaders that they don't have the authority to put anyone to death, but this man has claimed to be God's Son. Suddenly Pilate realises, this is no game, and he too is afraid. Why? Well, because either Jesus is or he isn't. Either he is the Son of God, the king of Israel, the Messiah, the Lord, the way, the truth and life, or he isn't.

Poor Pilate! Now, he's under the microscope, a defendant in his own courtroom. He seems increasingly interested in Jesus and reluctant to condemn him, but in the end, he too bows to the pressure of the crowd. It's a real thing, this peer pressure. A real dangerous thing. You only have to look online to see the problem of anonymous or unrestrained or unaccountable, group mentality. Pilate gives in to it, while staying strong on one point, that sign, *'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.'* *'What I have written, I have written.'* Perhaps that was Pilate's eventual answer, to the all-important question he faced. We should give people the benefit of the doubt!

From Pilate to the Cross

From Pilate's headquarters, Jesus is taken to Golgotha. The scene is getting more intense and more bleak but Jesus' final words are full of compassion. *"Woman, here is your Son."* *"Here is your mother."* He ensures his mother will be cared for after his death and his disciple whom he loves will continue to learn about discipleship and devotion. *"I am thirsty,"* he says. *"Father, forgive them,"* he

pleads. *"Why have you forsaken me,"* he laments. *"Today, you shall be with me in paradise,"* he promises.' And finally, *'It is finished.'* *'Father into your hands I commend my spirit.'*

What's finished? What comes to an end on the cross? What finality do we find on the cross? It's been said that at the cross point of history, the crossroad of humanity, 'nothing is left unattended, nothing unknown, nothing unloved, nothing unredeemed.' Our sin. Our guilt. Our shame. Our fight. Our flight. Our stubbornness. Our bowing to pressure. Every human attitude and attribute that is put under the microscope and found wanting. Jesus says, 'It is all finished.' Accomplished. Over. Complete. Forgiven. You can leave it here, because he has born its weight, paid its price and endured its punishment. It is finished.

Conclusion

So, how do you imagine your final moments? Probably not like Jesus' final moments. However, we imagine them and however they actually occur, the most important thing is who will be there to shepherd us from this valley of tears into eternal peace. The answer is found on the cross. The answer is found in Jesus. Let us pray.