

FOR YOU AND ME

Mark 9-29-39

He knows He's going to die. He knows that because He is in control of whether or not it will happen. His friends don't have a clue. They won't be surprised if things get complicated, if there is violence, if they might themselves suffer or even die in the process. But they have no idea that He is going to allow Himself to be killed.

His enemies prefer to discredit Him or even negotiate a way to keep Him from saying the things that ruin their control over other people. They would love it if He just kept quiet and went away. But He forces the issue. In fact He is on His way to Jerusalem where He will encounter them in front of everyone in the temple. Whatever is said there won't be heresy. It can't be discredited by saying the simple minded Galileans in the north, where He comes from, can be so easily fooled. And in the confrontation He will make them look like fools. He will see through their traps, their attempts to get Him to make a gaffe, and totally discredit them.

He is not like other radicals who have come and gone—the Galileans, those at the Pool of Siloam, Theudas. They had all been taken care of by the Romans who saw them as threats. But this Jesus is not a military leader or a revolutionary. He tells people to pay taxes to Rome. Whatever problems there are with him involve the Jewish faith, not Roman law. Certainly the Romans have the power to take Him out. But they prefer to do things peacefully. It's a lot cheaper that way. And a Roman official like the governor, Pontius Pilate, is going to do a lot better with Caesar, the emperor, if he keeps the peace.

His enemies are an interesting mix--the Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees control the temple and all the sacrifices that go on there. They get their authority by cooperating with the Romans. Their average countryman does not like them because of that, but they do have the support of the people of Jerusalem who makes their living

from all the pilgrims who come to the temple to worship God. The Pharisees have nothing to do with the Romans. They have no power except what they have from the people who look up to them as being the ideal Jews who obey the laws better than all the other people. Normally these groups are the bitterest of enemies. But He so threatens both of them that they join forces. Hitler scared people enough that the US and Great Britain allied with the Soviet Union to fight him.

Even after aggravating His enemies, He doesn't have to die. Jerusalem is swollen with Jewish pilgrims from all over the world to celebrate the Passover. Many of these are people from His home area of Galilee. Doing harm to Jesus at that time could cause great problems for Jesus' enemies. All He has to do is stay in public, and they will never touch Him. And He doesn't even have to stay in Jerusalem where His enemies have their strength.

But He does go back to Jerusalem. He goes back knowing that one of His own friends, Judas, has taken money from those enemies to get Jesus into a place where they can arrest Him without people knowing about it. He does reveal Judas and his plot, but in a way that His friends don't understand. He goes to a place called Gethsemane, a low point outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem. It is place to press oil out of olives. Being spring, it is not olive season, so no one is there, especially in the middle of the night. He knows Judas is coming with a band of soldiers to arrest Him, but He does nothing to stop it. Instead when His friend Peter draws a sword and begins to fight to protect Him, He orders Peter to put the sword away. He lets Himself be arrested and taken to the den of His enemies without the sleeping crowds knowing what was going on.

He is dragged before the Jewish council, before both Sadducees and Pharisees, to be put on

trial even though it is illegal to do so before dawn. He says nothing to defend Himself. They try to put before Him witnesses to condemn Him. According to the Old Testament it takes two or three witnesses to do that, but no two witnesses can give the same testimony. He could go free. They know that the prophet Isaiah said that the Messiah would be able to judge without seeing. So they make fun of Him by blind folding Him, hitting Him, and saying, "Prophecy. If you are the Messiah tells us who hit you." But in frustration the high priest, the leaders of the Sadducees asks Him if He is the Son of God. All He has to do is remain silent. But He answers and says, "I am." "I am" does not just say He is the Son of God. To the Jewish leaders hearing Him it brings to mind the sacred name of God, the name God revealed to Moses in the burning bush, the name that Jews did not say out loud in fear that they might break the commandment about using God's name in vain. They condemn Him to death.

They drag Him early in the morning to the court outside where the Roman governor Pilate was. They don't go into the palace, Pilate stayed in because He was a Gentile. They surround the area with their accomplices, many of the merchants who He had driven out of the temple on Sunday, people who see Him as a threat to their profits. The governor is only there because it is Passover. With so many Jews packed in and around Jerusalem for their most sacred festival, he is there to help keep the peace. Normally he is away from the stink of Jerusalem with the sacrifices of so many animals in the temple and lives in Caesarea, a town on the coast that is very Roman and enjoys the fresh sea breezes. Pilate wants to do anything to prevent a riot. Pilate hears the accusations against Jesus, but these only seem to concern their religion. Rome wants to stay clear of this. Pilate would just love to have Him give a reason for Pilate to let Him go. But He does nothing to defend Himself. Pilate thinks He could get out of it by having Him beaten. But that only serves to have the enemies of this want all the more to have Him executed. And still He says nothing to help Himself out of it. Finally

Pilate tries to get out of by washing his hands, but He is the one who has to authorize the execution.

As He is forced to drag a cross to a hill called Golgotha, "the skull," he sees crowds of people mourning for Him. These are His admirers, those who could be motivated to revolt if He rallies them. But instead He tells them, "Don't cry for Me, but for your town, Jerusalem, which will be destroyed."

He gets to the top of the hill. They nail Him to the cross. He still can get out of this, not by appealing for human help, but by using the power He has, the power as God almighty. He could simply jump off the cross, use martial arts against His enemies, or send a cosmic ray and zap all those who oppose Him. He is still in control, but He lets it happen.

What people see is the agony of crucifixion. They see the blood all over Him, the excruciating pain as He lifts Himself up against the rough wooden cross with His back turned to hamburger by the Roman whips and His ankles pushing against the nail driven through them. He stays up there for a while getting His breath, but the pain is too much; and He falls down hanging by His arms as it gets harder and harder for Him to breath. Up and down like that He goes in agony. But what people don't see is what He suffers inside. He is taking on the sin of the world. All the fury of the hell we humans deserve for our sins is now His. He cries out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me." The worst part of hell is being abandoned by God. He is now abandoned by His Father. But all through this He refuses to curse His Father, to stop trusting completely in Him.

He is control of this. He can stop this at any time. But He doesn't. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again." It is what He had to do. Why?—not because He was forced

to, but because He wanted to, because He loves us that much.

We all know who the “He” is. Jesus went to the cross to die. But that isn’t just a story, because He went to that cross for you and me. He wasn’t a helpless victim who got caught up in events He could not handle. He is the God the Son, God almighty, who set aside all His prerogatives as God, became a human like you and me, and voluntarily suffered hell in our place. We have heard that story, but it is something we need to hear again and again. As St. Paul told us in our second lesson, “For one will scarcely die for a righteous person— though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In the face of our doubts, fears, anxieties, temptations the message is clear—Jesus died for you and me.

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