

1st Sunday In Lent
February 13, 2005
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI
Pastor Bill Heiges

John 18:1-11 – When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. (2) Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. (3) So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. (4) Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” (5) “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) (6) When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. (7) Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” (8) “I told you that I am he,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” (9) This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you have given me.” (10) Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) (11) Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

My fellow members, who are very precious, specially chosen and dearly loved by God,

We may not realize it or even believe it, but so much of what we do in life is based on getting our needs met. Every day we crave air to breathe, food to eat and water to drink. These are natural needs we need met. But there are some other needs, not so easily seen but just as powerful. Some of our most powerful needs is our need for love, acceptance and our need for approval. In order to get those needs met otherwise sane people will do some pretty foolish, destructive and selfish things. I think of young gals who will give themselves physically in order to gain a guy’s love and approval. Or young people who cave into pressure to drink or do drugs in order to be accepted and liked by their peers. I think of married people who search the internet for love. All of them do those selfish and destructive things to get their needs met. Most often we seek to get our needs met by other people – what they do for us, or more importantly what they think and say of us. We think we need their approval in order to feel good about ourselves. In most cases this is very unhealthy, but not always.

It depends on who and what you are looking for. Many people looked to Jesus for help, hope and healing. Some of them earnestly sought him out. I think of the friends who tore a hole in a roof to lower their paralyzed friend before Jesus so he could be made whole. I think of Jairus who wanted his sick daughter made well. I think of the ten lepers who came to Jesus crying for cleansing. And I think of blind Bartimaeus who wanted to see. Those were all legitimate needs. They all turned to Jesus and sought him out.

What are you here for today? What do you hope to take home from this service? What are the driving needs in your life right now that you just can’t seem to get met no matter how hard you try? Jesus asks us a very penetrating question, the same question he asked the mob who came to arrest him.

WHO ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Yes, who are you looking for, and what do you hope to get when you find him?

John begins the Passion History of our Lord by writing, “*When he had finished praying.*” When Jesus had finished saying all the things he had to say that evening in the upper room. They include everything John writes from chapter 13 through chapter 17. It all took place on what we know as Maundy Thursday. John began by writing, *It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*” That is when Jesus got down on his knees and washed his disciples’ feet, giving them (and us) an example that we should serve others just as Jesus was willing to serve us. He then instituted the Lord’s Supper for us. He gave the new commandment, *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another*” (Jn 13:34-35). He then taught some very deep and beautiful truths in the next few chapters. And finally, he concluded by praying that beautiful and eloquent high priestly prayer.

It was immediately after this that “*Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley.*” They went out the city gate and made their way down the steep valley. And I can just imagine what Jesus and his disciples saw as they crossed the brook Kidron. It has been estimated that over 250,000+ lambs were sacrificed each year during the Passover. There was a basin next to the altar in front of the temple that caught all the blood from these lambs. There was a channel from that basin leading outside the temple. It emptied into the brook Kidron. That evening the water ran red from the blood of the lambs as Jesus crossed over, a grim and vivid reminder to him of what lay ahead.

“*On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.*” This was known as the Mount of Olives. It was a place outside the city of Jerusalem where many well-to-do people kept private gardens. Jesus had access to one of those gardens that was named Gethsemane. Gethsemane means “olive press.” You can just picture the instrument that was used to crush the fruit of the olives and squeeze out its oil. I can barely imagine the “pressure” Jesus felt that night in the garden as he lay face down on the ground engaged in gut-wrenching prayer to his Father. He felt the weight and burden of sins of the world, all mankind’s eternal destiny depending on him. The pressure was so great that we are told that great drops of blood were mixed with the sweat that poured out of Jesus.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus went there? We know he went there to pray. He even asked his closest disciples and friends to watch and pray with him. John tells us, “*Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him.*” Jesus looked ahead and “saw” the arrest, the unjust trials, the beatings, the scourging, the nails, the cross and the tomb. He knew how difficult and challenging the task God laid before him was. He sought out his Father. He wanted to know and do his Father’s will. He looked to his Father for strength and courage to do what was right, to do what needed to be done in order to rescue a world lost and captive to sin.

What a lesson Jesus teaches! He was totally devoted to his Father and fully committed to doing his Father’s will no matter what the personal cost to himself. When we are faced with hard and difficult challenges, things that go far beyond our human abilities to fix or control, do we seek God first, his kingdom and righteousness (Mt 6:33)? Do we earnestly seek him out? Do we want to know what his will is? And are we equally committed and devoted to doing God’s will in our life, no matter what the cost may be? That is what Jesus did.

As I said, the garden Gethsemane was a familiar place to Jesus and his disciples. Jesus would often go there to be alone and pray. He would take his disciples away from the pressing crowds of people so he could instruct them in private. John continues our narrative, “*Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying*

torches, lanterns and weapons.” The word for detachment of soldiers in the Greek normally meant a group of 600 soldiers. At its smallest it was a group of 200 soldiers, so this was a fairly large mob coming to get Jesus. I’m not sure why they were carrying lanterns and torches. The Passover always occurred during a full moon. Perhaps they expected Jesus to run and hide and they would be forced to search for him.

But we are told that Jesus “went out” to meet them. He didn’t run or hide. Just the opposite. As we look at Jesus closely, the first thing we see is his **courage**. And we know where he got that courage. It came from time spent alone with his Father in prayer. There’s another lesson for us.

John continues, Jesus “*went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’ ‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘I am he,’ Jesus said. When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground (4b-6).*” The next thing we see from Jesus is his **power & authority**. There was nothing weak or wimpy about him, no hint of fear. He was in total control of the situation, perfectly composed. Did you see what happened when he spoke the words, “**I AM** he?” Did you catch the significance of what he was saying? Jesus was making a bold confession and claim as God. Jesus spoke many “I AM” statements during his ministry. “I am the Door.” I am the Light of the World.” I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” “I am the Bread of Life.” I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” I am the Resurrection and the Life.” “Before Abraham was, I AM,” he once told the Pharisees, who picked up rocks to stone him because they recognized what Jesus was claiming.

The very moment Jesus spoke the words, “I AM he” the entire mob, all 600+ of them fell backwards to the ground, knocked down by his divine power, the same power he exercised in creation when he spoke things into existence. He was identifying himself as the same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, who gave Moses the name “I AM” to identify himself to the Israelites and to Pharaoh. He was the same God who rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, where the first Passover was started. Jesus was sending this crowd and message – “you are not taking me captive. I am willingly surrendering myself to you.” He was also sending his disciples a message. He could have escaped and passed right through the crowd as he had done many times before, and they would be powerless to lay a hand on him. But he chose not to.

“Again has asked them [the crowd who came to arrest him], ‘Who is it you want?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ ‘I told you that I am he,’ Jesus answered. ‘If you are looking for me, then let these men go.’” Here we see that Jesus **chose to die**. He even helped his enemies find and arrest him. He knew what they came for and what they would do to him, but he still willingly gave himself up to them. In John, chapter 10:17-18 Jesus once said in prophecy, *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”* Jesus told Peter that night he could have called down more than 12 legions of angels (more than 72,000 angels) to defend him. He chose not to. He let them capture him. He did it willingly for you and for me.

When Jesus told the crowd, *“If you are looking for me then let these men go,”* he was demonstrating his **protective love** for his own, his disciples. He was thinking about them and their safety above his own. John adds that Jesus did this in order to fulfill a prophecy that he himself once spoke: *This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me (vs. 9).* Jesus was also conscious of fulfilling every prophecy in Scripture. He didn’t want to lose anyone.

Here at St. Mark’s we are undergoing a major effort to reach all those members who have been drifting away from church and straying far from God. Our motive for doing this is the same as Jesus: we don’t

want to lose a single soul that God has given to us. We care about them and want to see everyone saved. Some may be related to you. Some may live next door or on your street. Some may work with you. You know them. You know they are members here. And you know that for whatever reason they have simply stopped coming here for worship. I want to encourage all of us to care for them like Jesus did his disciples, and stretch out our protective arm of love and invite them back.

As we watch this scene unfold, the disciples standing like deer in headlights behind Jesus, the crowd (hundreds of them) armed and carrying torches and lanterns standing in front of Jesus, we see something both tragic and heroic happen. *Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (vv. 10-11).* I think Peter is often given a bum rap here. Earlier, in the upper room, Peter made the boast that he would never fall away from Jesus, even if the other disciples did. He would follow Jesus to death. I believe Peter was sincere. And I think the sword he brought is proof of his sincerity. Yes, Peter was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong and misguided. All the disciples knew Jesus had enemies and that they were plotting to eliminate him. They knew the risk to his life in coming to Jerusalem. They just didn't understand that this was all part of God's plan. Jesus understood that – and accepted it. That is why he rebuked Peter and told him to put his sword away.

Then Jesus made the statement, *"Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"* This is where we see Jesus' total and **perfect obedience to his Father's will**. The cup = means the cup of suffering. As we said before, Jesus fully knew what lay ahead of him – the cross, the pain, the agony and the suffering a tortuous death by crucifixion. The cup = could also mean the cup of the Lord's wrath. Imagine how sin must anger a perfect and holy God. Sin deserves death. That is what the Law says and being just as well as holy God must punish sin. He must pour out his wrath on all of the world's sin. And he did – he poured it out on Jesus instead of us. He made his son drink that cup we filled with our crimes. This was all part of God's foreordained plan. *"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" (Is 53:10) as the Lord laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all. "The Lord makes his life a guilt offering."* Jesus knew that. That is why he came.

Jesus once told his followers, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34).* Jesus would never ask us to do something he himself was not first willing to do. The truth is he did deny himself in a huge way. He put our eternal needs ahead of his own life. He said "yes" to his Father's will. He said "yes" to our needs. He said "no" to his own life, took up his cross and laid down his life on it. Everyday there are so many opportunities to deny ourselves, to say "no" to our wants, "no" to our desires, "no" to temptation, "no" to sin that is so alluring – and say "yes" to our Father's will. And the most remarkable thing is God gives us the ability to do that: *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11-12).*

God knows all of your needs. And he has met every one in Jesus. Every one of your spiritual needs are met in him. You need grace, he gives it abundantly. You need forgiveness, he forgives fully every sin you are guilty of. You need salvation, it's yours. Eternal life? He gives that too. Like Paul wrote, God *"has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph 1:3).* And that is true for all our other needs, *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Ph 4:19).* And that means God will also meet your need for love, acceptance and approval.

Think of it, my friend! Jesus allowed himself to be arrested. He chose the nails! He chose the cross! He chose the tomb! Why? Because Jesus **CHOSE YOU!** He chose you in that garden. He chose you on the cross. He chose you when he rose. He chose you to spend all of eternity with him.

You don't have to look anywhere else to get your needs met. Jesus says, "I AM He. I am all you will ever need." Thank God for that. Amen.