

**God's Plan Transcends All Understanding
... When Jesus Was Arrested
Sermon on Matthew 26:47-56
Saint Mark's, Watertown
Pastor Karl Walther
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*He was pierced for our transgressions, Christ was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by Jesus' wounds we are healed.
Amen.*

God's Plan Always Transcends All Understanding

Dear fellow Christians—whose understanding God's plan transcends:

"I wouldn't have drawn it up that way...." Have you ever said something like that? Those of us who are designers of some sort or some kind of managerial types—we find ourselves saying things like that. We look at a project or we look at a situation, we see the plan drawn up by someone in charge, and we say, "I wouldn't have drawn it up that way." But sometimes the plan works anyway!—doesn't it? In fact, sometimes it's our own extra participation and our own extra prayers that God uses to cause it to work.

In today's sermon, I've been asked to address two things: first of all, and most importantly, God's Word to us today—and secondly, and also importantly, our capital funding appeal toward our school building project. In both cases: God's Plan Transcends All Understanding.

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding ... in the Betrayal of Jesus

This year, during the Sundays in Lent, we're considering Jesus' Passion History—primarily according to Saint Matthew. Last week: Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples and prayed. He felt the dread of our transgressions and guilt start to come crashing down upon his shoulders. He begged his Father – three times! – for a different way to take our sins away. But Jesus received the answer that: No, there was no other way to rescue us. He got up from his prayer and commented to his disciples, "Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

And then, we read: *While he was still speaking* – in immediate fulfillment of his prophecy – *Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived.* He was one of only a dozen men closest to Christ! *With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.* So, it was especially the seventy member Jewish ruling council which was opposing Jesus. *Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him."* That was the standard greeting—like a handshake and maybe an arm across the shoulder for us. *Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!"* – sort of literally, "Grace to you, my great One", and pretty cynical – *and kissed him. Jesus replied, "Friend* – but the word isn't really as warm as "friend"; it's "companion" or "associate" – "*My companion, do what you came for."*

Now, I don't know about you, but I wouldn't have drawn it up this way. I suppose I might have had Satan confront Jesus directly. But to involve Judas: one of Christ's very apostles? to involve the Sanhedrin: the leaders themselves of Christ's people?—no, that's just too sinister.

So, why did God do it this way? Or maybe better: what was God trying to convey to us by arranging the situation this way? Well, among other things maybe, he's trying to show us the depths of our sins. Our sins: every time we desire what God wouldn't desire, every time we say what God wouldn't say, every time we do what God wouldn't want us to do—our every sin is really a betrayal of Jesus: just like Judas perpetrated. And our sins are a tragic miscarriage of responsibility—just like that of the Jewish leaders. We have the responsibility to serve Christ, and instead we crucify him. How heinous!

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding ... in the Arrest of Jesus

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding. That's true, too, in the arrest of Jesus. We read: *Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus* – seized God! can you imagine?! – *and arrested him* – as if God were a criminal! But at least one guy had his right mind, according to our way of thinking.... *With that, one of Jesus' companions* – this really was a friend of his, the Apostle Peter – *reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.* He must have been going for the kill, and missed only slightly. Of course, in a moment, Jesus would heal the ear. But for now: *"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.* Huh? In this world, might makes right. In fact, even according to Scripture itself, governments do have the right to fight to defend their vital interests. However, Jesus explains: *Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?*—literally, seventy-two thousand angels! each one of which was capable of whipping this troop. *But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?!"*

Granted, the Scriptures had to be fulfilled. What God promises, he must complete. Still, I don't suppose I'd have drawn it up this way in the first place. I imagine I might have had Peter aim four inches to his right; that would have taken care of one of the enemies. Then, I suppose I'd have had everybody else rush at Peter. Then, I'd have had Jesus flick his left pinky and strike them all dead! Or if he really wanted to involve an angel to do the dirty work, he could have snapped his finger for one to arrive and "clean house".

But God didn't do it my way. Why not? It's because God's real power ... is his love. God's love led him to plan from all eternity to slaughter his Son – his only Son! his perfect Son! his obedient Son! his beloved Son! – as the purchase price of our adoption. God's love has made us his sons and daughters! That love is God's real power. And it never shone so brightly as here!

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding ... in the Solitude of Jesus

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding. That's true, finally, in Jesus' solitude while suffering. We read: *At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion* – obviously not! – *that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?* In fact: *Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me*—because God's people would have rebelled against you! *But this has all taken place* – once again! – *that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled."* And: *Then* – tragically, but importantly – *all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

I wouldn't have drawn it up that way. I mean: I'd have had Peter stride forthrightly after Jesus, to defend him in court. I'd have had lots of people gather to witness the accomplishment of our salvation. I'd have had John weep quietly after Jesus.

But God didn't do it my way. "All the disciples deserted him and fled." So did we. I didn't defend him in court, or walk with him to the cross, or suffer crucifixion with

Jesus. Neither did you. Our prayers didn't urge him on, nor did they make our hearts predisposed to welcome him. Our compassion did not win his heart to reciprocate his kindness. Our potential did not lead him to gamble upon our reclamation. Christ Jesus accomplished our salvation alone, entirely on his own, without our assistance.

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding ... also in Our School Building Project

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding. It's most certainly true in the Passion of our Lord. It's also true in our own personal lives, isn't it? Can't we all think of times where we'd say, "That was rough; I never thought I'd make it; I'd never choose to go through that again; but finally, it was good for me; the dear Lord knew what he was doing"? God's Plan Transcends All Understanding also nowadays in the proclamation of this blessed Gospel message—and let me say: specifically in our school building project and our capital funding appeal. We'd have never drawn it up this way....

First of all, I don't suppose any of us would have come up with the concept of a parochial school to begin with. After all, there are public schools to be had, and they're free. Although our parochial school is exceedingly efficient with its money – in fact, almost too efficient – it still costs our congregation plenty of funds to operate one.

But it's worth every single solitary penny—and hundreds of millions more! I mean: I would never disrespect public schools. I am the product of public schools—K through twelve. Some of you are employed in public schools; many of you attended public schools; some of you still attend public schools, and I myself have taught you or will teach you catechism class on Wednesday afternoons. God grant that you act as salt and light in the public school system!

But none of that changes the fact that our school is a treasure. None of that changes the fact that every day two and a half hundred students – and may the Spirit increase their number! – constantly hear Christ Jesus their Savior: and get challenged to live lives here and eternally for him. Who knows how many thousands of souls do fill and will fill the courts of glory – many of those souls seated in front of me right now! – because they trusted the Word of Jesus Christ they heard at Saint Mark's School?

God's Plan Transcends All Understanding! And that's true too, I suppose, in the way we're aiming to fund our building plan. The building plan itself is not beyond our understanding. If we grant that parents these days are looking for Christian education for their three, four, and five-year olds, if we grant that computer labs and science labs are simply a part of school these days, if we grant that our bands and choirs (not only at school but also at church) are gifts from God, and if we grant that the present gymnasium is the logical place to find such space, then the building plan is not beyond our understanding. If you grant that you have to have some sort of gym, and for that matter one nice chunk of indoor space (not only for school but also for the congregation's use), and if you grant that these days you need an office (especially for security's sake) that's not buried in the middle of the school, then our building plan is not beyond our understanding.

But we still wouldn't draw up the funding plan this way. We'd want God gently to rain down from heaven fifties and hundreds just as deep as he has delivered to us snow this winter. Or we'd want God to have one of our members win the Publishers Clearing House prize for the year—and handle the project in one fell swoop. Or at least we'd want it to come to us in one big estate.

But what if God wants to loosen our die-hard grip on our money? What if God wants to use this opportunity to teach us that we can give him a hunk of money back?—

and he will still feed us, he will still clothe us, he will still shelter us, and he will actually make us more content and happier! What if God wants to use this opportunity to test – and so: to increase! – our love for him and our faith in him? What if God wants to give you and me the joy of saying, “I really do trust you, Lord; here’s my cheerful, generous, and repeated gift—uncoerced, regardless of the gifts of others, and reflecting your love for me”? ...“I want the joy of arranging for others to hear the good news of Christ!”

God’s Plan Transcends All Understanding! You might even wonder whether the dear Lord foresaw that some construction workers would need a place to work soon, and that interest rates on new construction would be less prohibitive than they sometimes are, and that tax rebates might be coming to us all, which we could – if we wanted, I suppose – plow right back into this project....

God’s Plan Transcends All Understanding! It’s true of our school building project and our capital funding campaign. But please don’t forget!—it is so very true regarding our salvation, our forgiveness, and our eternal life: found in Jesus Christ! Amen.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Jesus Christ the iniquity of us all. Amen.