

Sunday, April 3, 2022

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

Betrayal and Redemption -from Darkness to Light

Part 5: *Disordered Love*

Mark 15:25-37

PRAYER

Our Loving & Good God, as we read these stories of betrayal and redemption, help us to understand the power of Love, the light of compassion, the necessity of forgiveness, and the reliability of your redemption. As we come to the foot of the cross today, open our hearts to receive a deeper understanding of your remarkable sacrifice for the sake of Love, and guide us along this final stretch as we walk from darkness to light. AMEN.

INTRODUCTION:

Today we come to the final instalment of our Lenten series we called, **Betrayal and Redemption - from Darkness to Light**. Together over the last 5 Sunday's and in our small study groups, we have discussed some of the classic stories from the Bible that begin with a heart wrenching betrayal. Adam and Eve started us off by being suckered by the serpent into eating the forbidden fruit. Then, Joseph was savagely betrayed by his brothers and left for dead. Next we moved on to Jesus' favorite disciple Peter, who in his confusion and fear, denied even knowing Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested. Last week, Gail preached about the betrayal of the prodigal son, and in your small groups this week, you discussed the infamous betrayal of Judas, which brings us to today, our dramatic season finale, the crucifixion of Jesus. Each of these betrayal stories and many many more of them, found in the Bible, share a common theme. No matter how badly we behave or how badly we are treated by the ones we trust, redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration is always a possibility. In these sacred stories, the road leading from the forsaken darkness of betrayal to the healing light of redemption, is always and only paved with mercy, understanding, grace and forgiveness. It is the only way.

So let us turn now to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 15, beginning on verse 25.

Jesus had been arrested and put on trial in Jerusalem by the corrupt religious authorities. They accuse him with wildly contrived, cooked up charges. These powerful men were truly threatened by this pitifully dressed, unbathed, wandering vagrant preacher. His liberating teachings, indiscriminate healings, and general disregard for the social order, was undermining a carefully built system that secured their fat and happy positions of privilege and power. These chief priests then handed Jesus over to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who was famous for applying his exceedingly brutal authority over the people of Judea. Pilate, almost casually, sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion. He is then severely beaten and mocked by Roman soldiers before being led through the streets to the place of execution.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 15:25-37

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

SERMON:***Betrayal and Redemption -from Darkness to Light - Part 5: Disordered Love***

It is really good to know that, while this may be the *season* finale of this series, as many of you know, the story does continue. If you haven't read it, you are in for quite a surprise ending! Stay tuned and follow us next Sunday, then Thursday and Friday night at 8pm and finally, the really big ending comes on Easter Sunday, April 17th. Join us for the whole ride. It is a rough trip, but you won't be disappointed, I promise.

But, back to today's story. In this dark moment, Mark paints a picture of a man who has been totally and thoroughly defeated. His family and loyal followers watch in horror as Jesus hangs there, hour after hour, his head swollen from the blows, his entire body wracked in unimaginable pain, his breathing is shallow and labored. Hours later, at noon, even the cosmos grieves as darkness covers the whole land. Everyone is disoriented and baffled by this sudden turn of events. Did Jesus have it wrong after all? They wonder, "How could *I* have got it so wrong? I actually believed this man was the son of God! Now look." The feelings of betrayal that day were naturally deep, and Jesus must have realized this too. In his humanity and compassion, he must have felt the weight of their disillusionment. According to Mark, he cries out his last words, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" It may seem that Jesus too felt forsaken by God. Maybe so.

Some Christian orthodoxy teaches that for Jesus to actually take on the sins of the world he must necessarily be separated from the presence of God. After all, that is the very definition and consequence of our sin. To sin is to do anything that separates you from being in the presence of God, and unresolved sin inevitably leads to death. So somehow, sin can only be redeemed, or resolved through some kind of atoning sacrificial death that pays the death penalty price for your sin. In this theology, Jesus takes our sin upon himself on the cross so that we might not suffer the ultimate consequence. The triune God must be fractured for a time so that this very same triune God can offer us redemption through willingly sacrificing his son. For those who believe that God actually needs a blood sacrifice to atone for our sins, then here you go. "It is finished." Jesus also said just before he died, according to John's Gospel. (Jn 19:30) Through Jesus' agonizing death, our loving God has offered the final blood sacrifice on our behalf so that we may be reconciled to God through Jesus' blood rather than our own.

Certainly, we can all agree that to give up your own life for the sake of another truly is the ultimate act of love. But still, I have to ask, is blood really what God requires? I think, I hope, there is way more to it than that. In fact, I think the real betrayal that leads to Jesus being killed was not allowed or needed by God, but from us. Human beings are the guilty party in this death. Furthermore, I think we would do the very same thing if Jesus came today. Look what we did to Gandhi and King! No, God is not culpable for the death of Jesus. Human beings are. What God *did* do, in an ultimate act of loving-kindness and mercy, is turn the tables on our self-righteous, self-involved sinfulness. You see we couldn't kill love; it rose from the dead! Even now, try as we may, we still can't kill love. Love will always rise again, because God is love, and true love simply can never be killed. No sin, can separate us from the love of God. Only we can separate ourselves from God by our own will and refusal to accept God's reconciling grace.

Our problem is that human beings have a really hard time knowing what the fullness of God's love is really like. Think about it, the teachings of Jesus are really hard to actually follow. You may even disagree with his idea of how to love. We want fairness over forgiveness, honor over humility, and dominant power over compassionate acceptance. We tend to think of love as a possession to protect what is ours rather than a gift that connects us all. God's love demands that we love everyone as we love ourselves. Our idea of love is sometimes called, disordered love. It's still love but our priorities are jumbled up.

The term disordered love was first coined by one of history's most influential theologians and philosophers, Augustine Aurelius - later to be known as Augustine of Hippo. He concluded that sin, is ultimately a lack of love, either for God or for your neighbor. He famously stated that "The essence of sin is disordered love." Disordered love means that we often love less-important things more, and more-important things less than we ought to, and this wrong prioritization leads to unhappiness and disorder in our lives.

Betrayal happens when our disordered love causes us to view people as a means to an end rather than just loving them. We even look for God only as a useful means of saving ourselves from the shadowed, shameful behavior we all share. Disordered love is what tempted Eve to bite that apple, Joseph to be thrown into that pit by his brothers, Peter to deny Jesus, the prodigal son to ask for his inheritance, and Judas to betray Jesus. They all thought it was the best option at the time for their own wellbeing.

Even still, what we see in Jesus is what love actually is. He willingly suffers the cross as the ultimate redemptive story. In solidarity of all who feel abandoned, unjustly accused, persecuted and betrayed, Jesus walks the very same path and in doing so, leads everyone who cares to follow from the darkness of our own execution to the light and promise of resurrection. Here we see the free flowing grace of forgiveness, over and over and over until finally, our idea of love is reordered and we are reoriented back to the original blessing of our true selves.

The apostle Paul puts it so perfectly in his first letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 13 when he writes,

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

The road from betrayal to redemption is long. To emerge from darkness to light is necessarily a rocky and painful trail. To go from the deep wounds inflicted by disordered love to the tell-tail scars that mark recovery, we must be seriously intentional and boldly face whatever trauma or sin brought us to this point in the first place. That's why this road is rarely even attempted. We tend to want to hold our gashed souls as some kind of moniker that tells the world how badly we have been hurt, or hide from the guilt and pain that we

have inflicted on others through self-justification and temporal distraction. It takes a boatload of courage and a real understanding of humility to even begin the journey. But remaining in the pridefulness of our disordered love only widens the gap between war and peace, God and human being. Only in finding humility to admit our own fragility will we ever know the grace of God, and that grace is always waiting, beckoning us further and deeper into the heart of Love, no matter what we do or how bad we have been hurt. No amount of blood can buy it. Grace is the free gift of God.

When Jesus cried, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* He was actually quoting, word for word, the first line of Psalm 22. Look it up yourself today. It is almost a blow-by-blow description of a crucifixion. Like most of the Psalms it begins with the despair and struggle of the human condition and the dire consequence of disordered love but ends with a renewed trust in the God who always rescues and redeems. What Jesus' question says to me is that even when I feel abandoned by God and can see no way forward or back, that Jesus himself has already blazed a trail through. Jesus has already walked through the anguish and pain of innocent suffering. And now we know that this story has another act. Even death is defeated by holy love.

Next Sunday we begin what is known as Holy Week. It is the reenactment of the bizarre events that take Jesus and his followers from a glorious, rollicking flash mob parade through the streets of Jerusalem to today's horror of a State sanctioned execution. No matter what you may or may not believe about Jesus, the events of Holy Week are chilling. To be sure, what happens to the son of God when he comes to reveal the true nature of God's untamed love is dark and unsettling. Retelling the events that lead to the cross brings into stark relief how disordered love can spin out of control so quickly and also how far God's love will go to lead us out of the chaos to a reordered redemption. Please join us next Sunday, and then again on Thursday and Friday at 8pm, here in the sanctuary or on-line streaming. This is the only road I know of that will take us from our darkness into God's light. To love this way is to employ a faith that knows, in the end, death is only the *season* finale. In this story, true love always wins.