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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Lent 5, Series B
Saturday, March 20th, 2021
Sunday, March 21st, 2021

Sermon: Three
Text: Mark 10:32-45

Focus Statement: Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he must suffer, be killed, and rise again.

Function Statement: That they would listen to the commands and promises of God.

Sermon Structure: Story Applied

Doctrinal Locus: “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but gladly hear and learn it” (SC, Third Commandment).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Hear the words of Jesus: “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise” (Mark 10:33-34, ESV).¹ Today in our Gospel reading we hear Jesus’ third and final “Passion” Prediction, as these pronouncements in the Synoptic Gospels have come to be called. Or, as my teacher, Jim Voelz, harps on repeatedly, these are Jesus’ predictions of his death *and resurrection!*² For Jesus never speaks of his suffering and death without also speaking of his resurrection.

Three times Jesus told his disciples that he must be killed and rise again. *Three times!* The first time was at the Gates of Hell in Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:31). The second time was immediately after his descent from the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:31). The third time

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

² James W. Voelz and Christopher W. Mitchell, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 768.

was on his final journey to Jerusalem, where he would die in less than a week's time (Mark 10:33-34).

You may notice that with each successive prediction of his death and resurrection, Jesus gives more and more detail. (*Aside: We included a bulletin insert for you that shows each of these predictions in parallel with one another to help highlight the similarities and differences between each of the three. I encourage you to take a look at it right now.*)

JESUS' THREE PREDICTIONS OF HIS PASSION, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION

Mark 8:31 (ESV)

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.

Mark 9:31 (ESV)

The Son of Man is going to be delivered [betrayed] into the hands of men,

and they will kill him.

And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.

Mark 10:33-34 (ESV)

See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes,

and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him.

And after three days he will rise.

In the first Passion Prediction (sorry, Dr. Voelz!) Jesus describes everything in fairly general terms—he would suffer “many things... and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Yet Jesus does insert specific mention that he would be rejected by the Jewish religious authorities, “the elders and the chief priests and the scribes.” Jesus knew who his enemies were.

In the second Passion Prediction, Jesus adds the horrifying detail that he would be betrayed. The Greek word for “deliver” also means “betray” (*paradidōmi, παραδίδομι*). At the Last Supper, Jesus would again portend his betrayal by Judas Iscariot. “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me... It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me” (Mark 14:18, 20). Jesus would not be taken by surprise.

The third and final Passion Prediction is the goriest, describing in great detail the kind of humiliation Christ would undergo for us, including the mockery and scourging by the Roman soldiers (“the Gentiles”). Also here, with the word “condemn,” is the first indication that his death would be carried out by a court of law. He would not be murdered by a mob. He would be publicly executed in the Roman way. The cross was the crux of the matter.³ “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Clearly, Jesus knew what he was getting himself into. There was no doubt in his mind what would happen on Thursday and Friday of the coming week.

Quite notably, what remains the same in each of the three Passion Predictions is Jesus’ repeated use of the title Son of Man, which was his favorite self-designation, as well as the explicit assertion that he would be killed and rise again after three days—not just that he would *die*, but that he would be *killed*. Jesus was not going to die comfortably in his bed at a ripe, old age. Nor would he fall sick and die of disease. His violent death was going to be ugly and horrible—and at the hands of other men. Yet he still chose the path of the cross because he knew what “was necessary” (δεῖ, *dei* [8:31]) to save us from our sins.

Long before Holy Week, Jesus laid it all out for the disciples: suffering, death, and resurrection. Three times Jesus told them what was going to happen in Jerusalem. He was going

³ Pun intended.

to suffer, be killed, and rise again. Suffer, die, and rise! Suffer, die, and rise! And three times they misunderstood or refused to hear what Jesus had to say.

After Jesus' first Passion Prediction, Simon Peter, the spokesman for the apostles, took Jesus to task and rebuked him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall *never* happen to you" (Matt. 16:22; cp. Mark 8:32). Peter didn't like Jesus' "cross-talk." As Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns: Satan is always trying to pull the Church away from the cross of Christ.⁴ So Jesus had to turn and rebuke Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Mark 8:33).

After the second Passion Prediction we are told that Jesus' disciples "did not *understand* the saying, and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:32). They didn't get it. But they were afraid to ask, no doubt because of the way in which Jesus sharply upbraided Peter in the previous incident.

But in some ways, the worst response of all takes place in today's Gospel lesson. For right after Jesus plainly told them of his suffering, death, and resurrection, two of the disciples, James and John, came up to Jesus to ask for a favor.

"What do you want?" Jesus asked.

They replied, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). In other words, when King Jesus finally sat on his throne, they wanted the next best seats in the house. They wanted to sit in positions of power and influence on either side of Jesus. In their selfish ambition, they desired to be considered the greatest in the kingdom of God.

Jesus told them sadly that they didn't really understand what they were asking for (v. 38), and it wasn't his to give anyway. "To sit at my right or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, vol. 4 in series *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 85.

for those for whom it has been prepared” (v. 40). And, as we discover in this week’s cartoon from *Agnus Day*, those places were prepared for two thieves, two malefactors who were crucified *with* Jesus (Luke 23:32-33).

Time and again Jesus pointed his disciples to the cross. Three times he predicted his passion, crucifixion, and resurrection. *Three times!*

How is it then, we may wonder, that Jesus’ disciples could be so devastated by his crucifixion and caught off guard by his resurrection even though he had told them *repeatedly*—three times—precisely what was to occur? How could they lose the plot when he spelled it out for them over and over and over again?

There’s a very simple answer: the disciples were not good listeners. They didn’t pay attention to what Jesus said. They got hung up on the wrong words and didn’t listen to the end. They were distracted by other concerns, such as which of them was the greatest. That is why, on the Mount of Transfiguration, our heavenly Father had to remind them: “This is my beloved Son; *listen* to him” (Mark 9:7). But they still didn’t listen. They got stuck on the suffering and death and never believed the part about the resurrection. Or they were distracted with their own sinful arguments about who was the greatest.

We’re not good listeners either. We tend only to hear what we want to hear or what we *expect* people to say. We interrupt one another. We react instead of respond. We start formulating our reply before the other person even finishes their question or the point they are trying to make. We do not listen for understanding. We seek only to be heard ourselves. And in the angry vitriol of American culture today, we wrongly believe that whoever shouts the loudest is the winner.

No wonder that we have such a hard time listening to God's Word. We hear God's commandments, but we do not obey him. We choose a life of sin instead of doing things God's way. We hear God's promises, but we do not *believe* them. Jesus tells us again and again that God will provide for our needs, protect our life, and pardon our sin. But we act as though everything were up to us and our own efforts. We even deceive ourselves into thinking that we must earn our salvation by being nice people and doing good deeds—or we despair when we come to the rude realization that we are completely incapable of doing exactly that. We forget the wonderful Word Jesus speaks in our Gospel today: “For even the Son of Man came not to *be* served, but to *serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

But Jesus has already laid it out for us over and over and over again. *Three times* he told you that he would suffer, die, and rise again for you. *Three times!* The Passion Predictions were not just for the first disciples. They are for today's disciples too. Because Jesus' suffering, cross, and empty tomb are *for you*. Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for many—to die and give his life *for you!* He's been telling us all along. Will you believe him? Will you receive his Word? Will you perceive the passion, cross, and resurrection? Jesus did it all for you. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.