

## SERMON MARK 15 THE TORTURE & HUMILIATION OF THE KING

April 3, 2022

Last Sunday our study of the *24 Hours That Changed the World* by Adam Hamilton dealt with Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate and being sentenced to death by crucifixion. This morning, let's discuss the torture and humiliation that Jesus faced on our behalf. Our scripture text is taken from the fifteen chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 15 -23.

Read Mark 15:15-23

On Friday morning Pilate sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion, one of the most inhumane forms of capital punishment ever devised by man. Before being crucified, though, Jesus was turned over to a group of Roman soldiers who proceeded to mock and torture Him. Flogging was a common form of torture in Jesus' day. The Jews as well as the Romans sometimes used it, as have cultures around the world over the years. Flogging is the practice of striking someone with a whip or stick for punishment or torture.

While maybe not flogging, when we were growing up, an old-fashioned whipping with a belt was often used on children before the current "time-out" concept came into fashion. I had never thought about it this way, but my dad would have made a good Roman soldier. He definitely believed in the principle of "spare the rod and spoil the child." Today he might have been charged with child abuse. There were three of us boys and every time we got into trouble, which was quite often, he didn't care who started it; he just whipped all three of us. One time, the neighbor's boy was over and we broke a piece of mom's crystal; so dad whipped all of us including the neighbor's boy.

At the time of this story, prisoners sometimes died from the flogging before they ever made it to their crucifixion. Flogging was designed to inflict incredible pain and damage while leaving the victim with just enough strength to carry his cross to the crucifixion site. The accounts of Jesus' torture and humiliation in the gospels closely follow the words of Isaiah 50:6 from one of the "Suffering Servant" songs: "I gave my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting." To the early Christians this passage foretold of Jesus' suffering at the hands of the Roman soldiers.

After the flogging, the soldiers held a mock coronation and brought Jesus a robe, probably one of their own robes. The soldiers then twisted a branch from a thorn tree into a rough crown. They pressed it down on His brow so that the thorns dug into His flesh. Matthew tells us that they took a reed and placed it in His hands as a mock scepter. Then they approached Him and circled Him, spitting on Him and striking Him in the face, shouting: "Hail, King of the Jews."

Now Adam Hamilton goes into more graphic detail in his book, but the thought of the torture and humiliation Jesus faced on our behalf can make you sick to your stomach and bring tears to

your eyes. The question is: how could these soldiers be so mean and cruel. But a better question might be: does it still happen today? Are we also not guilty of some kind of mistreatment of our fellow human beings?

Jesus became one of us and thus experienced all the pain, insults and cruelty that humanity could dish out. He knows what it means to feel small, to be attacked mentally and emotionally, and to be physically abused. He's been there. Many of us know what it is like to be insulted, bullied, taunted and made fun of by classmates at school or co-workers or family members. While some of us have been on the receiving end of this verbal and physical abuse, some of us may also be guilty of being on the giving end, going along with the crowd. Unfortunately, we hear a lot about bullying in schools today, and even at home and work. Many times we just stand back and don't step in to stop it. Why are children and grown-ups allowed to do this? Where is the justice, discipline and education? Where is the agape love that Jesus Christ taught and demonstrated?

For every child who has ever been taunted and humiliated, Jesus stood there that day. For every man and woman who have ever been made to feel small by others, He stood there that day. For every victim of torture, for everyone falsely condemned, for everyone who has been abused by another, He stood there as if to say: "I subjected myself to the hate and meanness of others so that I could identify with you."

Here in the cruel and inhumane treatment of Jesus we get a clear and tragic glimpse of what humanity did when God took on flesh and walked among us. Now Jesus could have destroyed all of them with one word; legions of angels stood ready to descend on these soldiers at His command. Remember what we discussed last Sunday, Jesus was in complete control through this event. Instead, Jesus bore the shame and humiliation, so that all who came after Him could learn from this experience and recognize the extent of God's love and grace. Remember what the letters in grace stand for: "G-R-A-C-E, God's Riches at Christ's Expense."

Why did the soldiers do this to the Man who loved lost people and healed the sick? What kind of men were these? Through our discussion of the last hours of Jesus' life over the past few weeks, we have met people who did things that are difficult to understand: the Sanhedrin demanding that Jesus be put to death; the crowd crying out for Him to be crucified; Pontius Pilate sentencing Him to satisfy the crowd; and the Roman soldiers torturing Him, then humiliating and spitting on Him. Unfortunately, as we all know too well, human beings throughout history have always been and are capable of cruelty towards one another, as we see in Ukraine today.

In his book, Adam Hamilton cites a 1971 study by Philip Zimbardo, a psychologist at Stanford University on the behavior of people in prisons. In his experiment, they transformed the

basement of the psychology building at Stanford into a prison and hired 24 students, randomly assigning 12 to be guards and 12 to be prisoners. The latter were arrested and brought to the “make-shift prison,” where they and their guards would be observed for 14 days. However, the experiment had to be called off after only 6 days because the college students chosen to be guards took their roles so enthusiastically that they began to hurt and oppress their fellow student prisoners. They had lost sight of the fact that it was only an experiment. Over the next 30 years, Zimbardo analyzed the data and concluded that every one of us is capable of being transformed from Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde.

A similar experiment was conducted in 1963 at Yale University. They took people right off the street and paid them \$4 an hour to sit in front of a set of gauges and dials. When told, they were to deliver electrical shocks to someone in another room who answered the questions wrong. The experiment was designed to see how far people would go if an authority figure told them they must go on increasing the force of the shock until it reached apparently fatal levels. Now no one was actually shocked; but the subjects did not know that, since they could only hear but not see the person in the other room, they were supposedly shocking.

Before the experiment, the researchers estimated that 1 percent would administer what they thought were lethal doses of electricity; however, the final results were surprising: 65 percent were willing to induce pain on their fellow human beings. Given the right conditions all of us can become monsters, capable of destroying others with weapons ranging from harsh words to the Nazi gas chambers or Russian tanks. It is a reality that we must face and guard against; looking instead to be the person God wants us to be.

When the soldiers were done with Jesus, they put His clothes back on Him and led Him from the courtyard of Pilate’s fortress toward the rocky hill on which He would be crucified. We often refer to this rock formation as Calvary, the Latin word for “skull.” Today it is about a five-minute walk, but for a man nearly beaten to death and forced to carry the 75-pound horizontal beam of the cross, this could have taken about 30 minutes. When Jesus could no longer carry His cross any farther, a man named Simon was enlisted to carry the cross the rest of the way.

Simon was not a follower of Jesus. He was just a visitor who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and probably had many things planned for that day as he made his way through the streets of the Holy City. And then it happened: he was seized by a Roman soldier and pressed into service, forced to carry the beam of a convicted man’s cross.

Frightened and perhaps annoyed, Simon picked up the beam, slung it over his shoulder, balanced it there, and then sought to help the bloodied and beaten man. The sooner he reached Calvary, the sooner he could leave, go back to his planned activities, and forget about

the whole experience. However, this unexpected interruption in his day would change his life forever, because he was carrying the cross of the Lord, the Son of God.

A key point in this story is that Jesus' suffering and death are intended to be a mirror held up to our souls, a reminder of the jealousy, pettiness, self-centeredness, spiritual blindness, and darkness that lurks in all our souls. We are meant to read the Gospel accounts of the torture, humiliation, and crucifixion of Jesus and say: "Never again!" or "God save us from ourselves. Lord have mercy upon us!" These accounts are meant to call us to repentance.

While this story shows us how humanity treated the Son of God, it also shows us how far God would go to save us from ourselves and from our sin. Jesus' suffering and death were not an accident. Jesus faced all the torture and humiliation and stood there silently as if to say: "Do you see the extent of the Father's love for you? Do you understand that I have come so that you might finally hear of a love that is willing to suffer, yea, even to die, in order to win you over?"

Jesus demonstrates a love that refuses to give in to vengeance or to give up. He is determined to love the enemy in order to win freedom for them and to restore them to a right relationship with God. In Romans 5:8, Paul states: "God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." And John 3:16 reaffirms us: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The cross clearly demonstrates the full extent of God's love for each of us.

One evening an old Cherokee Chief told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside each person. He said: "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside all of us." One is Evil – it is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, and ego. The other is Good – it is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?" The old Cherokee simply replied: "The one you feed, the one you **feed!**"

Which wolf are you feeding? We each have a choice each and every day on whether we will act like the Roman soldiers did or lend a helping hand like Simon. Will we follow the world's way of cruelty and meanness putting ourselves before others or will we try to defeat it by demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ to all we meet? As you receive communion, ask God to heal any past hurts that you may have experienced, and then ask for God's forgiveness of any hurts you may have inflicted on others. Make a commitment to follow the path of love demonstrated by Jesus Christ; look for the good in everyone. Amen