

Midweek Lent 4 Sermon
“Testing the Limits” (Luke 22:63-65)
March 6, 2024
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 4th Lenten Wednesday is Luke 22:63-65 – the two verses right before our 3rd reading.

“63 Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. 64 And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, “Prophecy! Who is the one who struck You?” 65 And many other things they blasphemously spoke against Him.”

So far the text...

We began Lent with Pastor Goetz’ excellent message on Ash Wednesday remembering the silver coins with which Judas Iscariot used to betray Jesus. Money can be used for good or evil. The love of money is the root of all evil and can become a god – 1st commandment. Judas himself was betrayed by this god, for he felt no contentment, but much despair, and threw that false god back into the temple. He through it into the holy place, the “naon”, as we heard on Sunday - back at the true God’s most holy space. For Judas Iscariot did not believe that he could find mercy from God’s mercy seat of the altar for his great crime. But that is where there is mercy – on the altar of the cross – that is where true riches are found – spiritual riches of debt forgiven, full pardon for sin!

There is mercy from God for all sinners and forgiveness of all sins except unbelief. There is mercy for Jesus’ captors who unjustly arrested Him. There is mercy for those captors who blindfolded Him, mocked Him, and beat Him. Jesus cried out from the cross right before His death. **“Forgive them Father for they do not know what they do.”** Luke 23:34.

Are you willing to show mercy and forgiveness to those who mock you and do evil to you? Do people test you to see your limits? Romans 12 describes the way God has called all Christians to live.

“14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:9-21)

Does God's Word put any limits on doing good to all people, even your enemies? and never repaying evil for evil? Absolutely not. No limits - Jesus told Peter when asked how many times he should forgive his brother...70x7.

Does it surprise us that Jesus didn't retaliate when they blindfolded Him? Like silver coins, there is nothing inherently bad about blindfolds. Children use them for fun to play pin the tail on the donkey. Kids close their eyes and pretend to be blindfolded when they play hide and go seek, or Marco Polo in the pool. When there is a birthday party, they often get blindfolded and try to hit the moving pinata. That's all good unless the blindfolded person becomes the pinata and everyone takes their turn to hit him. That's what happened to Jesus.

The temple guard thought they could amuse themselves by blindfolding Jesus, hitting Him and then taunting Him to say who did it. For they rejected the belief that Jesus was the Son of God and that He had the power of omniscience. They thought that a blindfold would stop Jesus from knowing who was doing the hitting. And Jesus patiently endured this evil against Him. Love for His Father and all people kept Him from calling down a legion of angels to defend Himself. **"Zeal for God's house consumed Him"**, as we heard from Psalm 69:9 on Sunday...zeal to do His Father's will and clean house – the evil of this world. Only through His permitting evil to be done to Him could it be forgiven completely.

It was mob rule what they were doing to Jesus. They egged each other on, everyone tried to outdo each other and prove that they were part of the group. They tested the limits. We see it all the time on TV. Some poor soul is being beaten up, like a policeman. Everyone is kicking and hitting. There's always one thug who has to get one more final kick in. Mob rule – fitting into the crowd.

Nowadays, it's becoming the normal that a group of masked thugs come into a store and steal everything they can get their hands on. I saw a video on the news that the innocent bystanders just stood dumbstruck that this was happening and as one woman walked out, she had to slap the bystander in the face before she left. She made sure she tested the limit of evil one more time.

Psalm 69 that we read on Sunday is a Messianic Psalm – the very thoughts and word of Jesus recorded by the prophets many years before Jesus suffered these things. In Psalm 69 we hear the thoughts of Jesus –

**"Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head;
They are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully;
Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it."**

Jesus had to restore all that evil men, women and children had stolen, broken, cursed, killed, and hated. He had to go to the cross for us! – "Zeal for God's house consumed Him." Though

Jesus suffered silently at the hands of His captors, we hear more of His thoughts continue in Psalm 69.

“Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; And for comforters, but I found none. 21 They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

And Jesus refused the gall to deaden the pain (Matthew 27:34). For He had to bear the full weight and suffering of all our sins, all our impatience, all our unwillingness to forgive, all our mockings and testing of God’s limits of forgiveness.

Yes, we know that at a young age children test the limits of their parents. They want to see how much they can get away with before there is a reaction from mom or dad. They want to know what is considered over the limit, and deserving of punishment. And even after testing that limit, don’t all children try to see how much they can get away with?

Teachers get tested by their students. How many paper airplanes can I throw while the teacher’s back is turned before I get a reaction? Husbands and wives test each other sometimes. How many times can I forget to put down the toilet lid before I get a reaction? Or how many times can I burn the food before a complaint is raised? Business owners get tested by the mobs, police get tested by those who don’t respect them. Do we not also test God’s limits? How much can I get away with?

Paul refutes this idea in Romans 6 that the more I sin, the more grace I can get. **“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”**

Yes, we have died to sin because we have been united with the death of Jesus Christ. He buried our sins by patiently enduring them all. How could I then dare to test God’s limits of forgiveness? Our sinful nature always wants to deceive us. One little white lie will be overlooked. I should be able to pick and choose who I should forgive depending on how nice they are to me...thinks our sinful nature. Oh, we invent new ways to test God’s limits all the time and rationalize to ourselves...everyone else is doing it! Each time it’s as if we were throwing the punch or slap to a blindfolded Jesus...

And yet Jesus endured it all, once and for all to forgive all our sins. Jesus was tested, continually tested by the devil in the desert, by His weak disciples who wanted to call fire down on the Samaritans, by the Pharisees who would see if He would heal on the Sabbath, or trick Him into saying that it’s not right to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus was tested by those who blindfolded Him,

whipped Him, nailed Him to the cross and taunted Him to come down if He was truly the Son of God.

Jesus' love was tested to the limit. But He patiently and silently endured like a sheep led to the slaughter. And when He did raise His voice, it was to reassure a real thief on the cross of his entrance into heaven through his faith in Jesus. Without a blindfold on, Jesus looked at the thief in love and said,

Luke 23:43 “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Without a blindfold on, Jesus watched as they divided His clothes and cast lots and said,

Luke 23:34 “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

For God's forgiveness knows no limits for all lost sinners, including you and me! As we will hear on Sunday in John 3:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Yes, God sees all things, knows all things and sent His Son to save the world that had forsaken Him. With joy we see His gracious will being carried out in our lives daily. For we who were once blind now see. We see and hear the Good News of the Gospel. Unblindfolded, we praise God that He has made us and brought us into His Kingdom of Grace through faith in Jesus.

Psalm 139 expresses this joy!

3 For You formed my inward parts;

You covered me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

Our souls know the marvelous work of Jesus' salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit! And we are glad that we are not hidden from God. He isn't blindfolded to our needs. On the contrary, Psalm 139 continues:

15 My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret,

And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.

And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me,

When as yet there were none of them. 17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!

There is no limit of mercy, love and forgiveness for us poor, sinful beings through Jesus our Savior! Amen.

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)