

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

March 13, 2016

“The Humiliation of the King”

“24 Hours That Changed the World” part 5

Mark 15:15-24

(Intro Video)

I have a confession this morning: I don't like movies rated PG-13 or higher. I avoid the sexual content and profane language, of course, but mostly, I don't like to see violence on the screen. The reason I am telling you this now is because today we are dealing with a very difficult topic: torture. As we begin, I'd like us to pray together. I often say, we need each other to be the church that Jesus wants us to be. Today is especially one of those days. Will you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, the Merciful and Glorious One, we can't fully understand why you went through what you did to save us, but we are grateful. We simply ask in these moments now, as we talk about your life, that you would surround us with a very real sense of your presence. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour. We want to worship you, and you alone. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

The torture and humiliation of Jesus Christ is a difficult subject to preach on, but it is an intimate and important part of the story of the crucifixion. This passage cuts right to the heart of the evil of humanity. The question that confronts us all is, “How could the Creator, Jesus Christ, allow his creation to torture and humiliate him?”

We like to talk about the miracles in the Bible, about Jesus' love and compassion. Those are the stories we tell our children at bedtime. But we tend

to avoid the hard topics in the Bible, the ones that reveal the darkness in humanity. Who would want to talk about God suffering?

I had a young girl ask me recently, why does God create mankind with the capacity for so much violence? Why not create us to be perfectly loving, kind, and compassionate?

I don't know for sure, but I have an idea. God created us all with the ability to choose. We can choose hate or love, death or life, bitterness or mercy, violence or gentleness. We are not robots. We have freewill. And in a world where we can freely love, by design, we also are free to choose not to love.

We know in this world there are people who choose to love, and there are those who choose to hate. Just take a look at the election rhetoric right now. People are sowing hatred.

But most of us here would probably say, "I'm not such a bad person." Even I would say that about myself. I would not intentionally choose violence, hate, racism, or anything similar. We would all say, "I could never murder, or torture, or abuse someone for fun." We would say that, wouldn't we?

And we would be deceiving ourselves.

Allow me to share two stories from Adam Hamilton's book, 24 Hours That Changed The World."

In 1971, Philip Zimbardo, a psychologist at Stanford University, conducted a study...regarding the behavior of people in prisons. He and his colleagues transformed the basement of the psychology building at Stanford into a prison and hired twenty-four middle-class Stanford students, randomly assigning twelve to be guards and twelve to be prisoners. The latter were arrested and brought to the "prison," where they and their guards would be

observed for fourteen days. But the experiment had to be called off after the sixth day because the college students chosen to be guards took to their roles so enthusiastically that they began to hurt and oppress their student prisoners. They had lost sight of the fact that it was an experiment. (page 85)

Earlier, in 1963, a man named Stanley Milgram at Yale University invited people off the street to participate in a scientific investigation. For four dollars, they would sit in a room for one hour and administer electric shocks to another person who was sitting out of sight in a different room answering questions. As the experiment went on, the person in charge would tell the subject to administer higher and higher voltage as the hidden person gave wrong answers. In actuality, there was no one hooked up in the other room, but they were made to think that this was a real experiment. Even though the subjects heard screaming, and eventually silence, 65% of them still administered up to 400 volts - a fatal dose of electricity. At the onset of the experiment, scientists had estimated that only one percent would push that boundary. They were very wrong. (page 86)

Normal people, under different influences, will commit terrible acts. In the right situation, we all can transform from a Dr. Jekyll to a Mr. Hyde. Think about the Germans living in the 1930's and 1940's under Hitler that participated in the Holocaust. Where they so different from you and me? What about the American citizens in the 1830's who forcibly removed the Native Americans on the Trail of Tears? Do we really think we are better than them? *(pause)*

All four gospels tell us that Jesus was subjected to terrible torture and humiliation. The thought of it makes me cringe. But rather than hide from this

terrible truth, we need to understand it. These tendencies exist in ourselves, and we need God's help to overcome them.

Now, the gospels differ slightly in their order of events before the crucifixion. While some may call these contradictions, I look at them as differing viewpoints. Each author had something specific to say about what happened to Jesus, and their focus varied accordingly. But all four authors say that at some point, Jesus was flogged by the Romans.

What did flogging or whipping entail? Let's look at this video from Israel for an explanation.

Video – the whipping post

Can you imagine the pain Jesus felt? I can't. I saw Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ." Granted, Gibson exaggerated the suffering of Jesus, because we live in a culture that is desensitized to violence. We can view horrible things on TV and in movies every day. So Gibson's movie was intended to shock us. But in reality what Jesus went through was truly brutal. The Romans were so effective at this whipping, sometimes the condemned died right then and there.

After beating Jesus nearly to death, the soldiers mocked him. Remember, they thought they were just doing their jobs. The Romans wanted to let the world know who was in control. Caesar was king. This punishment was given to deter anyone else from trying to rebel. They placed a purple robe on Jesus, probably an old uniform they had in the barracks. They twisted a crown from one of the many species of thorny trees that grows in the Holy Land. They jammed it on his head. "Hail, the King of the Jews!" Can you even imagine? The blood loss, the pain, and humiliation of standing naked before over 600 hundred soldiers?

I believe that Jesus was sad yet determined as he stood there. He never begged for mercy, he made no plea for them to stop. He looked into these faces so filled with hatred, and he loved them. He loved us. That can be the only explanation of why he went through all of this.

Then, to further add insult to injury, they forced Jesus to carry his own cross. Adam again explains this to us, and why Simon of Cyrene had to help Jesus finish the journey.

Video – carrying the cross

I really only have one question: how does all this make you feel? Are you a little queasy? Do you feel anguish, horror, even guilt? How could all this happen to Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

We could say, "I'd never do anything like that. I would stand up for Jesus." Remember, that's what all his disciples said, and yet they abandoned Christ. We might say, "It's not my fault. I wasn't there. The crowd did this to him." And that sounds an awful lot like Pilate and his excuses.

Within each of us is the power to love and the power to hate. Within each of us is the seed of sin, causing us to disobey God. Maybe with our human vision, we only see the great injustices that mar our world history. But God sees all. He sees our hearts. And this is why he shows us the suffering of Jesus Christ. There is a theology, called the moral influence of atonement, that arises from this passage, from the torture and humiliation of Christ. Rather than say that "God changed", or that "our salvation won through the crucifixion", the idea of the moral influence of atonement is that we are changed. As we look upon the suffering of Christ, everyone single one of us should be deeply moved by compassion. We should be moved to understand what Jesus went through for

our sakes. We should be moved to understand our deep need for forgiveness. Moved to say, as it reads in the former concentration camp in Dachau, in southern Germany, "Nie wieder." Never again. This violence must end.

We all are responsible for the world in which God has placed us. We are people called to seek justice, to pray for and serve our world so that God's kingdom can reign on earth. Listen to these words in 1st Peter 2:21-25.

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

We need to read this story of the torture of the King and understand, it is Jesus' finest hour. Sure, we like the stories of the miracles, the calming of the sea, the raising of the dead, the forgiving of the sinners. Those are all part of who Jesus is.

But let us not forget what Jesus went through for us. The humiliation he suffered is direct proof of his love for us, and it demands a response. Are we going to ignore the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Son of God, who suffered so horribly at the hands of his own creation? Or will we embrace him, follow him, lay down our lives for him, because his suffering moves us in the deepest part of

our souls, and makes us say, “Lord, I am so sorry for the things I have done. Please forgive me and grant me new life. Thank you for what you endured for my sake. Help me to stay in love with you.”

Memory verse

Philippians 2:8 - “And being found in appearance as a man, he (Jesus) humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”

Reflection questions

1. Recall a time in your life when you were injured. How did it feel? Was it something that you did to yourself, or did someone else hurt you?
2. How high is your tolerance to physical pain?
3. Were you ever bullied as a child? What happened? How did it feel?
4. Why did Jesus go through this torture when he could have easily used his great power and escaped? Does that affect what you think of Him?
5. How do Christians explain that the all-powerful Creator suffered at the hands of his creation? Is this difficult to accept? Why?
6. How do you feel when you think what Jesus did for you?