

“You Meant It for Evil, but God Meant It for Good” – Pr Jim Sprengle

Ash Wednesday, January 14, 2024

I. **Luke 22:1-13 previously read.**

II. **Well here we are again...**

- a. It's Lent, a time for some personal reflection... a time to repent and come home to Jesus... a time to remember and give thanks for Jesus, who went to the cross... but also rose again.
- b. The reason Lent is such a powerful time is that it leads us to Easter!
 - i. In the next several weeks, we will be consistently reminded of the journey Jesus took to the cross... and especially during our midweek services, we will spend time in the Gospel of Luke and the last hours of Jesus' life.
- c. But first, I want to take you back to the story of Joseph in Genesis... it's not in our readings tonight, but an important theme for the next several weeks.
 - i. First of all, Joseph was Jacob's favorite son... and his older brothers resented him... by the way, Joseph wasn't perfect either.
 - ii. The brothers got so sick of Joseph that they hatched a plan to get rid of him... they threw him in a pit, then sold him as a slave to traders that were heading into Egypt.
 1. Then, they poured blood on Joseph's colorful coat that his father gave him, and told Jacob that his son had been killed by wild animals...
 - iii. In Egypt, Joseph started out doing well, but then ended up in jail by no fault of his own... but through God's blessing, he actually became the second in command of the entire country.
 1. Joseph interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams and ended up saving everyone from a long famine in the land.
 2. Ironically, the people Joseph ended up saving were his own brothers who meant evil against him.
 - iv. So, after Jacob, the father dies, Joseph's brothers are afraid that Joseph will finally take revenge on them... But he doesn't.
 1. He sort of summarizes the story again, and how God's hand was in it all... He says, “You meant evil against me. But God meant it for good.” (Genesis 50:20)
- d. I want to be clear with you, Joseph's brothers did evil to him... they meant it for evil and they carried it out... God did not change that part – it happened.
 - i. However, God used the evil and deception that these sinful people carried out for a bigger plan that no one could imagine what He was up to.
 - ii. Everyone was clueless as to what God was going to do—but God is never clueless.

- iii. So again, Joseph's words will keep coming back to us over and over again during this Lenten season, "You meant evil against me. But God meant it for good."

III. **Our Gospel reading gives the events leading up to the Passover Meal.**

- a. When you think about it, we normally read about the Passover Meal on Maundy Thursday, which is a few days before Easter.
 - i. That's where we begin, as we spend time in the final hours of Jesus' life as He faces all kinds of evil...
 - ii. We will go with Jesus through His Passion over several weeks.
- b. The Passover was especially important to the Jewish people because it was a day of remembrance – remembering that God rescued them from bondage and evil in Egypt.
 - i. The whole story of Egypt enslaving the Hebrews, and God's deliverance through Moses and all the miracles is a great example of people meaning evil, but God using it for good.
 - 1. Pharaoh did everything in his power to resist God's plan, but in the end, what he meant for evil, God meant it for good.
- c. The point is that God did amazing things on that first Passover in Egypt, but however good that was... He is going to do something far greater on this Passover through Jesus His Son.
 - i. The story of the Passover and the Exodus from Egypt was the great salvation story of the Jewish people... but in this Passover Meal recorded by Luke, God is telling us an even greater story of deliverance and salvation...
 - ii. You could say this is a greater Passover.

IV. **Yet, as God's plan of salvation unfolds, evil is right there.**

- a. Evil is definitely coming against Jesus... with evil men of every type... and it's all supported by one driving force... satan.
- b. Just look at the evil coming out in these verses -
- c. Verse 2 says, "the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people."
 - i. These are the men who were supposed to guide and lead the people to welcome the Messiah one day... and now they are the ones looking to kill the Messiah!
- d. Then verse 3 says, "Then satan entered Judas called Iscariot."
 - i. Who else would be behind the betrayal of Jesus by a close friend and disciple?
 - ii. Satan uses every way he can to bring evil into the situation, and of course we are all too willing to oblige.
- e. So, Judas and the chief priests plan for evil, and the interesting thing is they plan around the crowds because they are afraid of them.
 - i. Yet, the crowd falls for the evil too – and will soon join the leaders in putting Jesus to death.

V. **Evil grows and gets carried out, but God is prepared.**

- a. You can imagine the evil and darkness brewing all around Jesus in His final hours... it's like these big, dark thunderstorms growing and closing in.
 - i. From human enemies like the religious leaders, the political leaders, Judas... and the crowds... to the spiritual enemy like satan... evil is growing against Jesus.
 - 1. By the way, all these people had no idea that they were coming together to carry out evil as a unified group under satan's guidance... but God knew.
- b. You see, a word in our Gospel reading keeps popping up over and over again... Prepared.
 - i. Five different times, Luke tells us that everything is ready... or that things are prepared.
 - ii. And that is because Jesus is ready... He is prepared.
 - iii. He knows about the evil, and He knows what's coming.
 - iv. Evil is on its way, and God's plan is for evil to take its best shot and even win for a time... as Jesus even says when He gets arrested, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." (Luke 22:53)
- c. But again, Jesus is ready.
 - i. He knows that He will be part of an even bigger rescue operation than Joseph carried out for His brothers... He knows that this will be a greater exodus than what Moses led by God's hand...
 - ii. No one else is ready in this story of redemption – not even Jesus' own followers...
 - 1. Peter wasn't ready as we will see...
 - 2. His followers would all abandon Him...
 - 3. The women didn't believe Jesus would rise again as they brought spices to prepare a dead body...
 - 4. No one was prepared, except Jesus... and that is why He alone would face the evil against Him and take it on Himself.

VI. **What part are we tempted to play in the evil that comes against Jesus?**

- a. We'll explore that this Lenten season, and by God's grace, once again we'll repent and turn away from that evil.
- b. What doubts do we have because evil is all around us, and we wonder how God is working in the midst of it all?
- c. Throughout this season, we want to give our temptations and doubts to Jesus... because He has defeated evil and rose from the grave to prove it.
 - i. And because He lives, NOTHING – not death or life or satan or struggle or anything—nothing can separate us from God's love in His crucified, risen, ascended, returning Son... Our Jesus.
- d. When the Lenten journey is done, how will our faith be different?
 - i. Although faith never changes when it comes to trusting in God, I pray that we can say with confidence... "You can't take God by surprise.

Jesus is always ready to restore and redeem. You meant it for evil...
But God meant it for good." Amen¹

¹ Sermon based on: "You Meant It for Evil, but God Meant It for Good: An Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday Sermon Series Based on the Gospel of Luke", Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, Concordia Seminary Publishing, St. Louis, 2022