

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: September 19, 2021

“A Planned and Humble Gift”

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Good morning and welcome to the unusual weather of Fall. There is so much richness in today's readings. This morning I would like to talk about something that we often slide by, and that is the proclaimed reason for the death of Jesus, the ultimate planned and humble gift.

Throughout the Gospels, and in particular in today's readings, we have Jesus warning the disciples that he is going to die. He then gentles that, with the fact that his death won't be permanent and that it is, after all, expected. However the disciples don't understand, don't have a reference for, and are, for the most part, in denial of this particular teaching of Jesus.

There is also this reference to serving rather than being the leader, and that even a child has worth. But we can't understand these themes without really taking a deep hard look at the crucifixion. No, it is not Good Friday, but Jesus' sacrifice is at the foundation of our understanding of how God works in the world.

So let's be clear, the subject of death for Jesus was not a new idea, or even shocking. There were a number of attempts to kill Jesus before His crucifixion in Jerusalem. Even during an earlier trip to Jerusalem the religious leaders attempted to kill Him. In John 8, while Jesus is teaching, we have the religious leaders picking up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

In the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4, the people in Nazareth try to throw Him over a large cliff. But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way. And of course, the final plot in Jerusalem when the chief priests and the elders of the people plotted together

to kill Jesus, but then determined it might not be a good idea to do it during the Festival, as cited in Matthew 26.

However, it was the prediction of Caiaphas that spoke of the necessity of Jesus' death. This is where our focus is today. Caiaphas stated "it is better for you that one man die for the people, than that the whole nation perish." Jesus was to die for the Jewish nation and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God. The ultimate sacrifice: a planned and humble gift.

Therefore, we have to see that the death of Jesus Christ was not a spontaneous tragedy or a historical mistake. It was part of the predetermined plot by the religious leaders of the day, but in actuality, there had been prophecies hundreds of years prior that Jesus would die. This leads us to God working within our own world to change the way we see and think about God. To change the Hebrew God of rules and judgment, to Jesus' example of a God of compassion and mercy.

Interestingly enough, God's timing within the religious structure was that on the Sunday following Jesus' death, the Israelites celebrated the *Feast of First Fruits*, which in this case celebrated the beginning of the harvest. In this celebration the Israelites return to God the first part of everything they had been given to show their gratitude. On that first day Jesus is resurrected as the life of God's first fruits, the guarantee that the rest would follow.

But the disciples in our Gospel today are having none of this. So much so are they missing the point that they begin to argue which one of them is the greatest. Imagine your teacher, your mystical friend that you have been traveling with all over the country turns to you and says, "Oh, by the way, people are going to kill me," and you are only worried about whether you are the best disciple, or maybe if it is you Jesus loves more.

Our tradition tells us that how we live our lives matter. It is true whether you are a terrible person, or a wonderful person, you will die. And how you live your life, and the legacy you leave matters. Jesus teaches us that each moment should count. Every person, even the lowest – and in their day it would be a child – has worth in God’s eyes. He is trying to tell them that this is such a radical idea – that it will cost him his life.

He has taken the religious hierarchy into question, and all the social norms that go with it. In our reading from James, those same disciples who didn’t get it, are now preaching it, writing it, and teaching those very radical ideas. That is why we are here today.

Why is this important? There seems to be a lot of envy in our world today: whether it is the vaccination thing, the racial divide, economic stress, social media pressure, the conserving of resources. I bet someone you know, or maybe even like, has a different opinion on any of these or other things.

We are called. We are called by the very wisdom that Jesus teaches his disciples here, that we should act in kindness. Although kindness will very likely **not** be returned; still, that is no reason not to act kindly. It is often said that the higher up we find ourselves in terms of power, influence, and wealth the more vulnerable we are to pride.

The Bible is very clear; to be truly great you must be humble. The world says we need to be self-sufficient, self-assured, and feel good about ourselves. But the Bible also says we need to be humble and promote others to be self-sufficient, self- assured and personally in a good place too. We are all children of God. Jesus informing the disciples that he is willing to give his life very humbly is our example, and the proclamation that even death will not end his service to the world is our hope, telling us we have nothing to lose.

When we dismiss our worship services we always state in some way “to go in peace to love and serve the world.” As James reminds us, those who want peace in their lives must

strive for righteousness. We can not pick and choose our interactions, but we can choose our **reactions**.

Let's not just push past the planned death of Jesus like the disciples did. Let us not mock that sacrifice by causing more division in the world. Let us not be afraid to sacrifice our egos, for the sake of love, compassion and peace. I leave you with some things to ponder.

The proud heart wants to prove they are right, *but the servant heart is willing to yield the right to be right.*

The proud heart desires to be served and to receive, *but the servant heart desires to serve and to give.*

The proud heart desires to be a success, *but the servant heart is motivated to be faithful and help others succeed.*

The proud heart thinks how lucky others are to have them, *but the servant heart thinks how incredible God is to use them at all.*

The proud heart is quick to blame others, *but the servant heart accepts responsibility and sees where they can improve.*

The proud heart asks God to answer prayers directly, *but the servant heart accepts God's choices in life as way of soul enrichment.*

It is not Good Friday, but we are to remember the reasons why Good Friday happened, as they are the foundation to our faith and way of life. Jesus' death was not pretty, not royal, and not appreciated at that moment. It is not to be ignored, it was not a spontaneous tragedy or a historical mistake. We need to understand that it was not a surprise, but instead a planned and humble gift. **Amen**