



Immanuel Lutheran Church

Transcript from February 28, 2021 sermon preached by Rev. Tab Ottmers

The text for our sermon this morning comes from the Gospel reading, particularly verse thirty-four, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." And also from the epistle, St. Paul writes in Romans five, verse six, "for while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us, and that we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God's grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This morning, the second Sunday in Lent, we consider our enemy. Yes, of course, the devil himself. St. Paul also calls death, the last enemy to be defeated. Today, we move our eyes from just the enemies out there, and we confess that we are our own worst enemy. But we also hear and remember that Christ has died for us, to make us no longer his enemies but friends, brothers and sisters, children of God.

One criteria that makes for a good movie is that it has a really good, bad guy. A really good enemy. A good bad guy makes for a good movie. The worse the bad guy is, the better the hero is for stopping him. You remember classic villains; Darth Vader, Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*, Lex Luthor, whoever it is that's in charge of the Texas energy grid. Take your pick. There's no shortage of good enemies. Today, our readings teach us who it is that is the enemy of God, and what he does about it. First, our Gospel reading. Here we have someone who he might not really consider to be an enemy-- Peter. At first, Peter is seen as a hero. Jesus asks the disciples, "who do you all say I am?" Peter steps up and speaks on behalf of all the apostles. He's not afraid to stand up. Peter says, "you are the Christ." This is true, of course, even the devil confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One. It's an accurate answer. But Jesus takes it even a step further. Jesus begins to teach us and His disciples what it means to be the Christ. He begins to answer the question that I drill into the confirmand's head and--hopefully you had drilled into your head as well--we ask, "what does this mean?" The disciples knew who Jesus was. But what does this mean?

Jesus begins to teach them he says, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed. And after three days rise again." There he is. There's the enemy. The chief priests, the scribes, the elders, they must be the enemy. Peter speaks up again. Matthew has a few more details in this conversation. And Matthew tells us that after this Peter stands up and objects he says, "No, Lord, this shall not happen to you. The enemy will not get the upper hands." Peter rebukes Jesus. The enemy cannot win. "Jesus. You are the hero, not the villain! You are the Christ, the chosen one! We saw it at the Transfiguration. We just heard a couple weeks ago. We know we saw it, you're baptized by John. Not possible. Jesus. You don't know what you are saying.



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Death and loss is for the villain. Not for you. You're supposed to be the good guy." In Peters opinion, Jesus makes for a pretty poor villain.

And no one would cast Jesus for such a role. Yet this is what Jesus has come to do before his father in heaven. Jesus becomes our sin. Jesus, the one who is no villain, in fact, he's perfect. He tells us in the whole world what it is that he's come to do. Jesus has come to be the worst villain before God, to have our sins placed upon him, even though he committed no sins of his own, to take all the sins of the world on himself, to claim them as his own. And then to die. Jesus then, it seems, changes the direction of the conversation. Yes, he does mention the villain, he turns to Peter rebukes him and says, "Get behind Me, Satan, you are not setting your mind on the things of God. But on the things of man." Brave Peter, who we thought was once a hero, now is called Satan by Jesus. Peter was teaching the wrong doctrine. Peter was not teaching the true identity of what it means to be the Christ. Peter was misusing God's word. He was breaking the second commandment. You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. And now consider what Jesus is saying, is the mind of God. The mind of God is for Jesus to die, to be betrayed, to be thought of as nothing in this world to be stepped on to be trampled. To lose all respect. And to die for these very people. That is the mind of God--in death, is victory. If you could take the lethal injection for a drug dealer who targets kids, would you do that for him to be spared? Would you take the place for public enemy number one? Would you die for a bully, just so he could be spared, and knowing he would be ungrateful? Would you do that? No, you wouldn't. And neither would I, because we don't have the mind of God.

"And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, Jesus said to them, 'if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Or whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake in the gospel's, will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? What can a man give in return for his soul for whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of His father, with the whole angels.'" We do not have the mind of God. The cross, our crosses, they're not our joys. Jesus went to the cross, and it was his joy to endure the cross to die for his enemies for while we were yet enemies of God. We were reconciled to God by the death of his son. The son, the Holy Son of God dead. Enemies. Say, the perfect movie. The perfect director. The perfect writer. However, this storyline won't ever win an Oscar. And we too should deny and turn away from the celebration of the world. Friendship with the world, James says, it's enmity with God. The one who would be the worst choice for a villain in all the history of the world turns out to be the best one cast for the role of savior. For he comes to forfeit all of his glory. So that he can take your sin.

All the times you have not desired to die to your own selfish flesh, to die to your own wants, all the times, you would rather people cater to you and bow down to your wants and your desires. Yes. Jesus comes to bare your cross. We hear this reading today, and I think it's really good to hear it during Lent. Because it reminds us that of all the people we deal with, it's important to have a Lenten discipline.



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Because in disciplining our flesh, and denying ourselves, the desires of the flesh, we see it's not so much other people who are our enemies. But it is our own selfish flesh. That in your Lenten fasts, as you try to deny yourself, your flesh, you realize your worst enemy isn't a person. But it's your own sinful flesh. That in working on your own log in your own eye, pretty soon you begin to not notice other people's splinters. That in focusing on the Lenten discipline, and denying yourself, you begin to truly see how sinful you are. And that will help you not see the sins of others so easily.

Jesus came to deny himself. Jesus came, not so that he would be victorious with the opinion of the world, but so that he would remain faithful to his father. Jesus came to play your part as the enemy of God, taking your sin of not having your mind on the things of God. Instead, our minds are more content to think how bad everyone else is. Perhaps you're more content to whisper and gossip, rather than speak openly with fellow Christians. Maybe it's easier to not have devotions at home. But it certainly isn't faithful to Christ. Yes, the sins the thoughts, the words and deeds. Our villainous past. All of it laid on the back of Christ. Yes, we would be the better choice for the villain. Enemy number one. So we repent. For that's when we don't roleplay. That's when we're not reading a script. That's when we speak the truth. When the Holy Spirit opens our lips, when we confess, we speak the truth. When, then, are enemies, no longer the enemies of God?

When God declares us forgiven. When the judge says not guilty. When the director doesn't say cut, but when the director gives you a new role. A new life. A life given to us and baptism, where your very identity before God is changed. And we pray our identity before our brothers and sisters in the world reflects that change. When God for the sake of Jesus declares you, righteous. You, my dear friends, your sins are forgiven. You have nothing to hide. Your sins are gone. You have no reason to take some other role as appearing as a perfect Christian. As appearing as someone who the wind driven snow and--I couldn't have used that analogy until recently in Texas--you don't have to pretend you're someone who's pure and white as the wind driven snow. No, but you live by faith in that promise. That though our sins be scarlet, we are indeed forgiven. Are you the enemy of God? Yes, our sinful flesh is still at war with God.

If you don't believe that, try taking up some Lenten fasts, deny your flesh and see how much control you have. And when you fail, your Lord will be standing there waiting. And he will, like he always has, forgive you. Joyfully forgive you. But thanks be to God, we are precisely the ones that Jesus has come for. Christ came for sinners. And in his cross, we are declared forgiven. In baptism, that declaration of God becomes personal. Do you still sin? Do you want forgiveness? Good. And here, even in his supper, as he calls us, personally, again and again to come to the altar, to receive Jesus' body and blood, he seals that very promise in you. Again, a reminder of your baptism. You are a child of God and He forgives you. He will always take care of you. This is where our old testament comes into play today too. Consider Abraham. God promised him a son in today's reading, but do you know how long he had to wait? After today's reading, Abraham waited twenty-four years. You're going to have a son, Abraham.



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Twenty-four years. It didn't look good for Abraham many times. Waiting, bearing his cross. It didn't look good many times, but our crosses never look good. Our crosses are never glorious, in the eyes of the world, nor in our own opinion. So also the church. We're in the same position as Abraham was. We trust in God's promises. Even though it looks like the villains win the day. Even though it looks like God might be losing. Even though our crosses of sickness, cancer, our bodies failing. Crosses of taking care of our families, taking care of kids, taking care of parents, taking care of spouses, taking care of our jobs. These crosses are the crosses that God has given to you. The cross is the enemy of your sinful flesh. God brings these crosses and he knows how long to weigh you down with them. For it is only in these times we begin to die to our own desires and call out to God for help. Call out to him for forgiveness. So even in the midst of your suffering in the midst of carrying your cross, you have peace with God. He gave His Son up for you so that he would not give you up. The villains do not win the day, the enemy within your own heart doesn't win. Your sins have no claim on you. Jesus doesn't just play your part. He has become your sin. He has taken your cross and shown you how he is victorious in staying faithful. He becomes you in order for you to become the sinless children of God.

What a script! What a show! But this is no movie. It's real. Real sinners, a real Savior. It turns out that Jesus is the perfect villain. Because he's the only one who's truly righteous. The only one who can take our sins. He takes our place and we--who formerly were villains--we are now made perfect children of God by faith. Only don't give up that faith. Don't look for another role, but remain faithful in Christ.

And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.