

A RISING TENSION

Luke 20:1-19

March 24, 2019

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Well friends here we are in the third Sunday of Lent. If you have been attending throughout Lent, you will know that Pastor Dennis, Pastor Greg and I are sharing a series of messages based on the events that occurred in the life of Jesus during the final week of his life on earth before his crucifixion. We call that week Holy Week. We're calling the series "Seven Days and Counting."

So on the first Sunday of Lent the message was all about Palm Sunday. Last week the message focused on other events that transpired after Palm Sunday specifically Jesus' cleansing of the Temple.

Today's message will focus on Luke 20 and the parable of the Tenants. Next week we'll address the plot to betray Jesus; the week after that will be about Jesus yielding to his Father's will when he said, "Not my will but yours..." And then on Palm/Passion Sunday we'll consider the passion of Jesus, his suffering, crucifixion and death.

Why are we doing this? Why did we decide to preach about Holy Week during the Sundays of Lent? It's because this is such a significant time in the life of Jesus that we don't want you to miss any of the events, any of the details. Some of us will attend worship on Palm Sunday, celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem when he was received like a king and because of our schedules, we won't return to the church until Easter when we all sing. "Christ the Lord is risen today!" If that happens we will have missed the events of that week which for us is the most important, most significant week in Jesus' life.

Hear me out here. Obviously the birth of Jesus is important to us so we celebrate it at Christmas. But it is during that final week of Jesus life on earth where he pays the penalty for our sin. Jesus is perfect and sinless yet he suffers for us. He dies on our behalf so that we can receive forgiveness for our sins and the hope and promise

of eternal life. Then when he is raised from death to life on Easter, he defeats the power of sin and death over us.

So Holy week is very important to us.

If we pretend to be living through Holy Week, then by now we have experienced Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. What a great day that must have been. People who were following Jesus were so excited. People who had only heard about Jesus were getting their first glimpse of him. He was rumored to be the son of God; some said he was the messiah. And here he was being received like a king. Many thought he would be crowned king of the Jews while he was there, perhaps in just a few days. It was a lively and an enthusiastic crowd. This was his first trip into Jerusalem, the city of David, the birthplace of Judaism. He had avoided Jerusalem 'til now.

Crowds around Jesus are swelling. The movement involving Jesus is growing. The authorities, the chief priests and teachers of the law are paying close attention to what's happening and they are worried.

Jesus drew more attention to himself and upset more of the Jewish leaders including those responsible for the Temple when he entered the temple courts and turned over the tables. Pastor Dennis shared that message last week. He accused them of turning the temple into a den of thieves instead of a house of prayer.

Listen to what's recorded in Luke 19:47 following that event.

Everyday he (Jesus) was teaching at the Temple, but the chief priests,
the teachers of the law, and the leaders of the people were trying to
kill him. Luke 19:47

But they couldn't find a way to do it.

You see, Jesus is no longer some rumor preaching out in remote villages. He is right under their noses, in the Temple!

So as one day of Holy Week moves into another, Jesus becomes more and more popular. The crowds swell. People hang on his words. As his popularity increases, so does the concern of the Jewish leaders about his ministry. Jesus has become a

major problem to them. They need to do something about him. They want to be rid of him.

Now as we move into the 20th chapter of Luke's Gospel, we find that the authority of Jesus is being questioned. They ask by what authority Jesus does what he does and says what he says. Jesus answers with a question about John's baptism. Was it from heaven or from men? That's a strange question. Why would he ask such a question?

Jesus was asking, in their opinion, was the work of John the Baptist God-inspired or man-devised. Luke's gospel says that the Jewish leaders were afraid to answer. They didn't want to discredit John because people considered him a prophet. But they didn't want to affirm John because John had baptized Jesus and that would provide credibility to Jesus' ministry. So they remained embarrassingly silent. Jesus then told these people a parable.

A man plants a vineyard and rents it to some farmers. He sends one of his servants to get some of the fruit at harvest time. The servant is beaten and sent away. He sends another. Same thing happens. He sends another servant. Same thing happens.

So, the owner sends his son.

“What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love, perhaps they will respect him.”

But they don't. Instead, they conspire.

“Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.”

So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

When the people heard this they said, “May this never be!”

Let's back up a bit. I think the son of the owner is meant to be Jesus, the son of God. The three servants sent and rejected probably symbolize the prophets who spoke on behalf of God and were rejected.

Listen again to the words of the owner.

What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him. Luke 20:13

The owner willingly sends his son to emphasize the importance of his mission, his message – to be among the people. It's as if he is saying, I'm very serious about this, so much so that I'm sending my son, my most beloved asset so that there will be no confusion about the message. The owner really wants them to comprehend his message and the critical nature of this situation.

This parable is not about the grapes that the tenants are unwilling to give to the owner's servants. But this parable is about the treasure that is among them; the treasure that they have rejected. That treasure is God's one and only son whom God has sent to earth to save and redeem the world. It's about the son having access to the world God created and the people who live there.

The religious leaders of Jesus day controlled all the power among the people except for the power that Rome exerted over all. They used their positions of authority to manipulate the masses and to secure their own interests. They exerted moral and religious authority to control fellow Jews who believed in God just as they did. They were desperate to hold onto their authority. Jesus was a threat to them, a threat that was growing louder and larger. And their growing concern was forcing them to do something.

When I think about everything that happened to Jesus leading up to his death, I often rethink the details and wonder that if something would have happened differently, this detail or that decision, that perhaps things would have turned out in a different way – better for Jesus.

When I consider the disposition of the Jewish leaders, why did they need to be so afraid? Why did they need to be so worried? I know why. Their political/religious structure could come crashing on them and they'd lose everything – power, wealth, prestige. (Which eventually happened.)

But these were supposedly men of God. Was there any thought among any of them that maybe God was at work in this whole thing? That maybe Jesus was in fact

God's son, that God had sent his son into the world for the good of the world, that he was the Messiah, the one the prophets predicted would come?

In my own life, I try to be prepared for what's ahead. I attempt to anticipate how things will turn out. But I can't know every detail of every event. Sometimes, often I simply need to lean on God, to trust that God is in the midst of events and circumstances around me. I wonder if any chief priests or teachers had any those thoughts.

Toward the end of the parable (after they've thrown out 3 servants and killed the son of the owner, what's next?) we hear these words:

What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others Luke 20:15b-16

In other words, the treasure will go elsewhere. The treasure, the savior, will go to where it, where He will be received. Where people will listen and accept what God intends for them. And that includes us.

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.

That which has been cast aside by the religious leaders of the day is their loss, and will lead to their demise, but it is the greatest treasure of all.

When Jesus was finished with his parable the religious leaders were not happy and by now their response has become predictable to us. Verse 19 reads:

The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people. Luke 20:19

Can you feel it? Can you feel the tension increasing between Jesus and the religious leaders? Can't you almost see the fury on the faces of those who are the subject of Jesus parable and sense their frustration at not being able to do anything about it? Jesus is so popular and has such a huge following, especially since that day he came into town on that donkey with all the fanfare.

With each passing day, with each passing event, with each passing moment the tension is rising. The authorities must do something to stop him. They must figure

out how they can destroy his ministry without causing a riot. But Jesus is so popular now. He is always surrounded by so many people. And those disciples never leave his side.

They wonder...Is there some way they can get to him? Is there some way they can get him alone? Is it possible to reach out to someone on the inside, someone who knows his schedule and routing, someone who can lead us to him?

And so they continue to conspire to destroy Jesus. And that's where we'll begin next Sunday.