

THE PLOT

Luke 22:1-6

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Let us pray:

In you, Lord our God, we will put our trust. We trust in you; do not let us be put to shame, nor let our enemies triumph over us. We are confident that no one who puts their hope in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come upon those who are treacherous. Show us your ways, Lord, teach us your paths. Guide us in your truth and teach us, for you are our God, our Savior, and we put our hope in you all day long. (Psalm 25 paraphrased.)

Remember us, Lord in your great mercy and love. Pursue us we pray in Jesus name.

A few weeks ago, Bekah got a gift certificate to a bookstore in Sewickley. So on a beautiful Saturday afternoon, she and I made our way across the hills in a non-anxious and non-direct route to the store.

I'll admit to you that I'm not a bookstore guy. I guess to be honest, I'm not a browse any kind of store guy - but I'm probably not a bookstore guy. I don't usually like just browsing for books. So as Bekah browsed through the bookstore with no particular item in mind, I kinda nosed around.

Bekah asked almost immediately if I was going to buy anything and to be honest I hadn't considered it before the question - I was only there with her. But a book did catch my eye when I first walked in. It was entitled, "Leadership in Turbulent Times." It had a picture of Abraham Lincoln on the cover with stars and a flag. Good strong hardcover book - a nice deep blue - and it even said the words 'winner of the Pulitzer prize.'

I didn't pick it up - but I kept nosing around to the back of the store where I found a rocking chair. It was a good "dad seat", although because it was in the back of the store in the children's section I doubt that they put it there for lazy dads like me.

After rocking for a few more minutes and watching Bekah make no particular attempt at choosing a book any time soon, I got back up and moved toward the front of the store. Something about that word leadership drew me in.

I moved back to the front of the store and this time I picked it up. On the back of the book was a quote by a leadership guy that I have read before and this was probably the hook that I needed.

Jim Collins author of "Good to Great" and "Built to Last" wrote, "Four towering individuals . . . in a masterwork on how good leaders become great leaders how burning personal ambition can be elevated into driving ambition for a cause greater than self. Riveting, uplifting, and incisive. Leadership is a culminating work of a true intellectual artist."

That was it! I was hooked. I didn't even look at the price of the book - I was taking it home. Anyway, I was supporting a good local business - it didn't matter the cost.

I'm not really that far through it to be honest - but the story and the progression of four of our historic presidents of the 19th and 20th centuries has me thinking a lot about who they were and how their lives shaped who they became. That word ambition comes back a lot and I've been wrestling with that even this week.

In one of the opening paragraphs, the author suggests that it is important to look at their lives and consider the situations, the ability to sustain ambition in the face of frustration, more importantly how they responded to those setbacks and reveals and managed to put themselves back together. Further, she posed the question or what she calls the riddle - "Do leaders shape the times or do the times summons the leaders?"

"Do leaders shape the times, or do the times summons the leaders?"

I consider that question often as I turn the pages, but that same question has been going through my mind and in my prayers this week as we continue to unfold and turn the pages of this great drama that is unfolding before us.

Seven days and Counting is a way for us to dive deeper and deeper into the ensuing drama of the last days of Christ with us on earth. You have been hearing the messages from the first week of our series as we consider all that was happening from the time that Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem to the time that he broke the chains of hell and death and arose victorious from the grave on Easter morning.

Seven Days and Counting isn't just about this last week, but it is more than that because it causes us to consider the story that led up to the story - the story within the story - the prequel to the story - or just the narrative that leads us to this place where we find Jesus.

Seven days and counting isn't just about Jesus in that last week but it is an invitation for us to walk with him - right there with him in that place - to imagine what it might have been like for us to be in the crowd, standing there watching, listening to his teaching, and accepting everything that Jesus has to offer.

Seven days and counting is an opportunity for us to consider - "Did Jesus shape the week, or did the week shape Jesus?"

That's an important question - but I need you to stay with me. Put a pin in that question and consider these things.

The Gospel of Luke has been moving us from Jesus Triumphant entry in the 19th chapter to a pretty steep rise in tension in chapter 22. Luke is continuing to interpret the identity of Jesus and at the same time share some of the most memorable events that happened in the week.

Early in this series, we told you that we would be walking through the last days of Jesus life. But here is the complication. Jesus came in the city on Sunday. He was in the temple on Monday throwing things into disarray, he was teaching on Tuesday in the temple and from what some writers say - he did that daily. But we've come to this blank space.

So before we go too much further - I will let you know that we are not dealing with Wednesday, technically. Yes we are on our fourth piece of the puzzle, but for most scholars, Wednesday was the silent day. Not much is shared.

But that doesn't mean that the events that we share even now are out of order because they in fact are in order - it's just a little fuzzy about at what point they happened between Wednesday and Thursday night when Jesus was in Gethsemane - but now I'm getting ahead of myself.

We are in the most memorable events of Jesus life and the tension is begging to rise. When Jesus was teaching in the temple, he was starting to really anger the Jewish leaders and they continued to conspire with one another about the best way to get rid of this troublemaker. They had their own ambitions and their own desires but they also had this growing crowd of Jews who were in the city for the Passover.

And this is where the story picks up. But let me take a deep breath with you. Let all that settle in for a moment.

Because what I need to do now is do a little flash back.

Lent - forty days long. Forty days for us to fast and to pray, to draw closer to God in our worship and praise. Forty days from ashes to Easter glory.

Forty days is a reminder that when Jesus began his ministry among us - he was thrust into the desert. Jesus - led by the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and went into the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Do you remember this story? It's an important part of the story about who Jesus was and who he will be for us because while in the desert he was tempted by the devil who offered him everything if he would just bow down and worship him. But Jesus resisted those three temptations and that frustrated the devil.

There is a whole sermon just in those temptations, but I tell you that because I want you to hear these words that are important. "When the devil had finished all these tempting, he left him until an opportune time."

The devil departed him until the opportune time and that time was now. Because now the leaders were growing more and more tired of Jesus and his teaching and they were looking for a way to get rid of him and the opportunity just presented itself.

So back we go to the 22nd chapter. Judas, the one who held the purse strings for the disciples, the one they called Iscariot was just what the devil needed. Seemingly unengaged, unmoved by the message, unhappy with the way that Jesus was moving toward a revolution - or maybe a

better way of saying it - that he was not moving them to a revolution has, this unfortunate encounter with the evil one.

We are not told how, when, or what it looked like - but we do know that the devil pursued him, moved in on him and used his own greed, self-centeredness, fear and uncertainty against him. Judas listened to the wrong voices and he went to the officers of the temple and offered Jesus up for a price.

Satan entering Judas is an escalation of the scene. The devil leads Judas to the temple authorities because it was all part of the Devils plan to gain control. He will do anything - any means necessary to get what he wants and that includes using anyone - or any of us for that matter.

The chief priests and the officers were delighted and agreed to give him money. They would do anything they could to get rid of Jesus and yet they were afraid of the people. Some of the accounts say that it was about 30 pieces of silver or 120 denarius the equivalent of 120 days of wages.

The plot thickens. The plot is set. The plot to kill Jesus is in full motion.

The interesting part of where we are in this novel, this story of Jesus last days among us is that on one hand you have leaders and authors who are conspiring to get rid of Jesus, you have the Devil who is seeking his own sort of power and authority and you have Jesus.

One of the points that I continue to make throughout this series is that the unfolding of the story before us is all part of God's plan for redemption. It's complicated and confusing sometimes, I know, but Jesus coming into our lives was all part of God's plan to show us a way to his kingdom, to show us his love, and ultimately for us to have a way to be saved from all of the things in life that cause us to stumble and fall.

The crazy thing is that God and the Devil have been at it for a long time. But God was beginning to put it all into place. It was his will for you and I to finally have peace and to be freed from the sin of the garden and no longer have to pay the sin offering. Once and for all - God was putting it all together.

So I'll ask it again, was Jesus making the time or was the time making Jesus?

The plot is in place. In a few days, Jesus will be betrayed and Judas will lead the temple guards exactly to the place that Jesus will be. He will show them who he is with a kiss and Jesus will be led away to be tried.

The Devil made him do it. And I guess you could say that God knew it would happen but God also knows that the evil one will continue to pursue and devise and scheme and work until he gets what he wants.

Not only will the devil get what he wants from Judas, but he will get what he wants from us.

Talk about tensions - every day there is the tension among us to walk with Jesus and at the same time lurking out there in the midst of the world is something that will continue to pursue us to take away everything that we have and destroy us. Constantly - the bombardment of messages, temptations, hurts and pains war and conflict. Sometimes I just think that the devil is out there whispering in our ears telling us that it will be ok - you don't need that relationship in your life - I have a better way. Its ok - you don't need others in your life - you can do it on your own. Its ok - you don't need to have it all figured out - life is roll of the dice anyway.

And the devil lurks, and the devil pursues, and the devil speaks and the devil uses others and the devil moves into the darkness and looks for an opportune time.

But God has a better plan for us. John 10:10 says to us, "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly." The scripture also tells us that Jesus, the son of God appeared to destroy the work of the devil.

But here's the interesting part of the riddle. God sent his son to free the world of the devil and his stronghold on life but evil is still out there lurking. God's redemptive plan is offered so that we might be free from the evil one - not just temporarily but forever.

Yet we have to keep working at it. We have to keep pursuing God and Christ in our lives. God has a better way, but we have to choose that better way. God's relentless love will keep pursuing us and chasing us - but we have to make that choice to follow him.

Jesus died to satisfy our sin payment once and for all - that we might have our sins forgiven.

That is a liberating statement - and guess what - the devil knows it.