

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MARCH 29, 2020
THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Litany
Based on Psalm 109

My accusers speak evil against my life.
But you, O Lord my Lord, act on my behalf for your name's sake;
your steadfast love is good, deliver me.
For I am poor and needy, and my heart is pierced within me.
Help Me, O Lord My God!
Save me according to your steadfast love.
With my mouth, I will give great thanks to the Lord!

Song of Focus
You Say "Love"
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. "He's bringing change! Be on your guard!
He's radical, wrong! He'll make our life hard!
Gotta stop him. He won't do things our way,"
the Pharisees say. The Pharisees say.
2. "His world's upside down, our world will go sour!
We'll lose it all: our privilege, pow'r!
It really can't wait, must stop him today,"
the Pharisees say. The Pharisees say.

Refrain:

But you say, "Welcome," offering kindness.
Knowing our sin, you grant forgiveness.
"Reach out in serving and lift prayers above."
You say all this but most of all, Lord, you say, "Love."

3. "They're not like us. Don't let them in.
We don't like their talk or color of skin.
They'll just bring change, won't do things our way."
So many say. So many say.

Refrain

But you say, "Welcome," offering kindness.

Knowing our sin, you grant forgiveness.
“Reach out in serving and lift prayers above.”
You say all this but most of all, Lord, you say, “Love.”

The Scripture

John 11:45-57

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So, the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, “What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? Surely, he will not come to the festival, will he?” Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

The Message

All Groan Up: Conflict

Terry Overfelt

Synopsis: *“What do we do now? This man keeps on doing things, creating God-signs. If we let him go on, pretty soon everyone will be believing in him and the Romans will come and remove what little power and privilege we still have.” – The Pharisees and High Priests (John 11:47-48).*

The navigation of conflict is part of growing up. From the early days of playground disputes to vying for shelf space in the office break-room refrigerator, conflict is a daily part of our existence. There are moments, however, where the stakes are higher than most. Ideologies are called into question. The loss of power and privilege are possible. Faith, security, and status quo are jostled. The way we deal with conflict in small matters may very well reveal our strengths and weaknesses when everything is on the line.



I Introduction

Listen with your ears for this time and place to hear the applicability of these short, sequential phrases of John's spirited Gospel:

Many believed. Some sought the authorities. Called a meeting. What are we to do? Everyone will believe. Our city and our nation! You know nothing at all! Prophecy. Gather in. No longer walk about openly. Near wilderness. Remain there. Purify yourself. What do you think? Will he come?

Yes, he will come.

II Who Will Come?

Have you been in trouble and rest assured, knowing who would come? I don't know what it was like for him that night. I know he was planning to drive over four hours the next day to see me graduate. But about sunset, I called from the hospital to say they were going to take out my appendix. My mother, the no nonsense nurse, knew the questions to ask. "Fever?"

"No."

"If I offered, you lobster would you eat it?"

"Yes."

"Can you stretch out your legs?"

"Yes."

"Nope. Not your appendix. Don't let them do it."

"We'll be right there," he said. He was the one who would hop in the car, U-turn on a dime. Or in this case, grab a family, in-law with a private plane, two six-packs of ponies and get to me in under two hours.

Against Medical Advice, this duo of astute diagnostics and intoxicating action, checked me out and flew me home. Groaning in mind, body and spirit; didn't plan for this, in pain, and lamenting the graduation I would not attend.

I still have my appendix. I wish he hadn't needed the ponies, but I don't know what it was like for him that night. I don't know what else he laid down to come for me. He was

an intoxicating man and often, so was his condition.

I'll tell stories for years – my whole life, of the times he saved the day in unorthodox ways; despite and sometimes because of his addiction. This is his rosary I am wearing. He was a holy man. God found him and put him to use time and again. When conflict arose, he was the banty Irishman there to help us meet it.

III The Saving of the Nation?

In today's gospel, Jesus, is about saving the day, and the Orthodox or Pharisaic Jews were not having it. Buckle into your Cessna. John is taking us on and amazing, unorthodox U-turn of events that end in the tragic death, where our faith picks up, but it is so interesting to see how the conflict escalated and left them clueless about what God was really doing in their midst.

Jesus is among his Jewish friends: Mary, Martha, and their newly unbound, resurrected brother, Lazarus whom Jesus just raised from a four-day stay in the grave.

EVERYBODY wiped their tears. These were the *many who believed*.

Others *sought the authorities*. They ran to tell on him. "He's performing many signs, and this one is a biggie!"

They were referred to as the "hoi loudaioi" (IU-day-way); those believers who reported unorthodox behavior to the Pharisees, and whom Jesus must avoid. (*understanding from Colleen M. Conway, Feasting on the Word, Exegetical Perspective John 11:45-54 p. 69*).

When the Pharisees heard of this miracle of resurrection, it was a big deal. It troubled them and they *called a meeting*:

1. If even death can be overcome by the power of Jesus, the Roman state-imposed fear of death will not keep the people in check any longer. *Everyone will believe in him!*
2. If the Roman state has weakened authority and Jesus, who is a Jew, rumored even as King of the Jews, is to blame, all Jews and our holy city are at risk for destruction by the empire. *Our city and our nation!*
3. If the radical teachings and miraculous signs of Jesus are to be believed above the rigor of the letter of the law, religious order, Judaism, the "hoi IU-day way" will lose its hold. We will fall apart.

So, when the rule-followers run into the city to tell of the resurrection they have just seen in Lazarus, this year's high priest, Caiaphas is on the spot. He had already,

well before this day, prophesied that this Jesus would have to die for the nation, to *'gather into one the dispersed children of God.'*

He was an unwitting prophet. Caiaphas had limited understanding of his vision that called for the death of Jesus because this Jesus was a troublemaker among the Jews in his mind. It would not be the dispersed children of Israel alone who would be gathered into one. It would be all nations, the whole world, who would be gathered in because of the death of Jesus. This was not a vision he could have fathomed.

For now, the Jewish people were divided, conflicted, and groaning
"What are we to do?" Caiaphas snapped at them, *"You know nothing at all!"*

Maybe, God needed Caiaphas to have limited vision, to hang onto the status quo; to sell this sentencing of Jesus to all who longed to protect the Temple and the Holy Nation! They feared the loss of power and privilege at the hands of the Romans, so his death could be justified.

They might have imagined ...

When he died, they would be strengthened in their orderly faith. Even those in the diaspora, who had moved out for centuries would come back to the Holy City, and they would have strength in numbers! *From that day on they planned to put Jesus to death.*

So, sacrifice one for all! Jews reunited, yes? Nope. Wrong diagnosis. Not according to the Mosaic Law appendix. Hoi! There is more information at the end of the story, and we know it.

IV Pack Mentality

Have you ever needed to separate yourself from pack mentality? This is a scary, volatile, conflict. It's a rising up of mind, body, and spirit escalation on steroids. Pheromones are flying off the crowded bodies.

These folks entered the temple mad and threatened; maybe jealous and zealous! The conflict escalated from, "I saw a sign," to "kill him," by the count of five sentences! Maybe they were used to conflict when it came to following the letter of the law. It took great discipline... maybe they were eager to cry foul to requite their own short comings punishments they had endured.

When we were kids, we all got quarantined for a Saturday. In Florissant, word got out that a dog pack was running loose in our area. We had to stay indoors, and we were so curious to see this pack. We had four dogs ourselves. Maybe we could introduce

them and have an Iditarod. But no, we understood that when they run together and are wild, they can be vicious.

Fortunately, this week, our dog Jake has shared his rule in the house with us. One day as I walked through the family room, he was looking out the bay window as he often does; his command post.



He kind of gorilla lunges at squirrels and robins. Not sure if the red chest calls a sort of “Toro!” None of the other birds seem to rile him. He turned to look at me as if to say, “Welcome to a Dog’s day, it’s not a bad gig, you’ll get used to it.”



V. Windows

It’s not just Jake who is willing to share the window. You have sent us encouragement that social distancing has already brought you gifts, and challenges. The Internet is full of home and car windows decorated with hearts and messages for the other- side- of- the- glass neighbors.

We have been set apart in this conflict of maintaining our health and containing pandemic for the wellness of the world. This comes at a time when we have been so polarized and divisive, and now we have a unanimous mantra of “Together.” Our common foe does not have a nationality, doctrine, ethnicity, gender identity, politics, or faith practice. As a faith community, we long for shared prayers and worship. All faiths have undergone persecution, challenge, separation, condemnation, but never all at the same time.

We mourn with each other. Do the heavens weep as our places of worship are stilled? In this moment, we hold all God’s beloved, who seek after the Sacred Heart in prayers from the mosque, temple, synagogue, church, cathedral, lodge, monastery, convent, woodland, prairie, and home where we have gathered to praise the Divine in community, and we all become – housed but not hushed. The common place we align is in a moment in time. We pray in the conflict together... for healing in the world. When the houses of worship emerge from this time, will there be a fresh outpouring singing, praising God, and having found favor with all people?

This is the Day?! We are not clueless prophets. Although we see dimly. We have eyes of the heart that see what God is doing in our midst. We have seen it before.

We were woke to love winning with the containment of the HIV/Aids virus. Our culture shifted!

(See article politico.com: Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here's How. Politico Magazine The Friday Cover, 34 big thinkers' predictions for what's to come, March 19, 2020)

VI. We Pray

Longing, encouragement, acceptance and reach that eclipses weaning, disappointment, judgment, and separation. Our common saints and saving grace come into our unanimous cheers, songs, and prayers for the medical teams, the first responders, grocers, pharmacists, scientists, volunteers, care providers, and all who stand in the conflict for us.



See Thursday's "Today Show," and know it will cost you a tissue square, as you behold the call and cost to the song, "Rise Up, my, my, my, my, Micaela."

Conclusion

Will He come? The Pharisees asked? Yes, he will come...and he will enter the conflict.

But first, to prepare, to brace like we are in this day. Jesus will steal away, and gather his friends for some protective, resting time together: No longer walk about openly. Near wilderness. Remain there. Purify yourself. What do you think? Will he come?

The prophet today would have said, "An unorthodox virus is coming to threaten the current condition of humankind...stop it in its tracks."

And not understanding at first, we would come to see that in its ferocity, it would unite the whole separated and siloed world in care and compassion, in science and service, in neighboring and togetherness; mind, body and spirit... of love.

We groan in our rebirth.
Jesus people, in the conflict, we rise. We rise!

Amen.