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April 7, 2019

5th Sunday of Lent

Mark 15:1-5

Good News: There Is Power in Silence

15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ²Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." ³Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Every morning I get up an hour early, just to have a time to pray. Four days a week I record a little devotional on Facebook. I imagine it is like doing a radio show. Though some days are better than others, my main interest is that the Word of God is read and maybe people will hear it and be encouraged to read it for themselves. There is power in the written Word of God.

About a year ago, during a seminar, I was encouraged to step into where people are and to step in with prayer and Scripture. I knew for me it would be Facebook. Sometimes I am encouraged and feel assured that I am doing the right thing. Sometimes I am discouraged and think it is a waste of time. I am up anyway, making sure I am not still in pajamas and to at least comb my hair before recording.

Last Sunday was I was truly blessed by our worship. I sensed God's presence in the singing and by those leading. I felt God's Spirit helping me preach and the sermon was being received. Afterwards we went singing to shut-ins. It was amazing to see how God orchestrated all our timing and the people we encountered.

We visited a woman I had never met before. We sang. We talked a little bit. The lady was touched and came to tears. In the end I prayed. She looked at me very closely. She asked me: "Tell me again, who you are?" Kathy said: "Her name is Jolita. She is our pastor at New Life UMC. She is from Lithuania."

The woman thought for a moment and said: "My son watches your devotional every morning, and shows it to me". I asked: "What's your son name?" After she said his name I recognized his name as being one of the regular Facebook listeners. I still have no clue who he is. Now, I am encouraged every time I see his name pop up on my screen.

What a gift it is to be able to see the way God works. Praise God! In Isaiah we read: "It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it" (Isaiah 55:11).

This man has never said a word to me nor written to me. None-the-less, I was reminded that God is in control and is doing a work through His word. God is at work even when He is silent – when we do not hear or see.

Last Sunday we looked at Peter's three denials of Jesus and the rooster crowing. We realized our own mistakes, our own denial of Jesus.

Today, the focus is on Jesus. Mark starts chapter 15 with the words: "As soon as." The action moves fast. Very early in the morning, elders, scribes and Sanhedrin, the chief priests all held meetings. Like today, all the political and religious leaders could not agree on anything. Now they came to an agreement – Jesus must be killed.

The Sanhedrin was the Jewish Supreme Court. It was made up of 71 men including priests. They had authority to pass down sentences that would be carried out for particular offenses. However, they were not able to condemn one to death and carry out executions. This was reserved for the Roman authorities. That's why they brought Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Our Lord Jesus was brought before a man who represented the most powerful human government on earth at that time. So we have the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man meeting in verse one.

Jesus was a beaten-up, handcuffed prisoner whom they'd pushed through the door into Pilate's residence. Why would they do it to Jesus? One reason, I think, was they did this for show—in order to impress Pilate that he needed to execute Jesus for them. So Jesus would look like the worst, most dangerous criminal.

So Pilate asked Him: "Are you the King of the Jews?" If you look more in to Greek text, the translation would be more like: "You—You are the King of the Jews?"

There is Jesus, in shackles, bruised and bleeding, with black eyes and fattened lips. This is what Jesus said back: "You—you say it."

Was Pilate concerned that Jesus will become a king? Look at Jesus. He is on the floor, handcuffed, spat upon, beaten. I think Pilate knew that he was no danger. Pilate was driven by an insatiable thirst for political power. He lived for status and celebrity. He placed his career before everyone and everything. He lived to exalt himself. His whole life was about Pilate. He also knew that if Caesar heard that he could not keep the people calm he would lose his job.

He was more concerned with keeping the Jews happy than he was in protecting an innocent man.

There are several ways to understand Jesus' response. It could be that Jesus' answer is ambiguous so that Pilate would not be able to understand or want to understand.

It could have been an idiom meaning something like when we say emphatically, “You said it!” or “You betcha!” or “You got that right!”.

“And they accused him of many things”. We do not find the full story in Mark, but we know that the reason for the council’s decision to condemn Jesus to death – blasphemy. Guilty verdict for blasphemy would serve their purpose among the Jews, but they needed more to get a death sentence from Pilate.

They came up with 3 charges:

1. Jesus was perverting the nation, arousing troublemakers, creating riots and dissension;
2. Jesus forbade giving tribute to Caesar
3. Jesus was saying that he himself is a King.

Pilate questioned him again: “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.”⁵ But Jesus made no further reply.

Jesus did not say a word. He chose to stay silent.

Hymn # 291 is an old spiritual that brings attention to Jesus’ silence. “He never said a mumbalin word – not a word.”

Some of us naturally enjoy silence. Some of us cannot stand quietness. There is a time when we all need to speak – speak for justice and righteousness. We all are called to share the gospel. There is a time to refrain from speaking.

There is old proverb: “Speech is silver and silence is golden.” Today we abbreviate it to “Silence is golden.”

None of the Sanhedrin, none of the elders, none of the scribes, stood for Jesus. All were against him. Have you ever been blamed of something you have not done? Have you been in a situation where you could not prove your truth? I have had a couple car accidents in my life. In one of them it was clearly not my fault, but the other driver was “somebody” in society. He had status and relationships and money. I had none of these. The way the accident happened would be possible, but hard, for me to prove my innocence. When the accident happened, I tried to tell him that it was his fault. He was yelling and calling me names saying that it was my fault. He threatened me. I remained silent. Lithuanian police, the Lithuanian court and the way the entire system functions are not same as here. I chose not to fight because I did not have the connections and could not win.

The all-powerful Son of God remained silent even while vilified. He knew he was going to win over all the evil in the world and that he had the ultimate of connections.

Matthew 26:53 inspired that much loved Gospel song.

*He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set him free
He could have called ten thousand angels
But he died alone, for you and me*

How many times, when little things happen in our family – between parents and children or between spouses – we say things when probably the best choice would be to remain silent. Almost every night I lay in my bed and I think of the words I should not have spoken. A joke or sarcasm may seem funny when I say it, but how do I know it did not hurt another person? Do I want to take the risk?

Jesus remained silent.

There is a big difference between a rural church and an urban one. I have been in the both. I had an opportunity to serve in the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius. It is a very modern, cosmopolitan city. We were trying to reopen a United Methodist church there. I worked with a great missionary. I hope you can meet him sometime. He kept telling me what a great pastor I would be. The repetition was annoying. It was not in my plans. I enjoy working with kids and youth.

One Sunday he told me that I would have to preach because he had to be in another town. I had not done it before. One of the reasons I objected was because of a few men who strongly believed that women cannot teach and should never preach. The church was new. We had about 20 people on Sunday. 10 of them were youth and kids. When the worship service started they could not believe that I was standing in front. I greeted, we sang a few hymns and when I read the Scripture and started to preach these men stood up and left the building encouraging others to do the same on their way out.

Talk about being crushed. Talk about being humiliated. I did not say a word but I was sobbing afterwards. I thought I would never again be standing to preach.

The priests, the elders, the highest assembly of Jewish leaders were determined to crucify Jesus. Yes, Jesus could prove that his innocence. He could have shown his power, but it was not his time and not his way.

He prayed before all these events started. Luke writes: “Jesus was in great pain and prayed so sincerely that his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood”. During this prayer he had already won the battle.

Jesus chose not to argue because he did not need to. In the book of John, Jesus said, “No one can take my life. I will choose to lay down my life.” Jesus knew he would rise again.

Why was Jesus silent? Because he knew who He is. The circumstances did not matter. The shame, the pain, the insults, the lies – all of this was not the most important thing. He knew He was the Son of God. Nothing could change that. We know he even prayed: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but yours be done." It was not easy for him to face the most horrible circumstances, pain and shame. He knew what needed to happen. Words and actions sometimes are not the strongest tool to fight with.

Jesus knew there is a bigger plan and He trusted in God, He knew it needed to happen so the Scripture could be fulfilled.

Isaiah 53

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,

Yet He opened not His mouth;

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,

And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,

So He opened not His mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

Are you going through a difficult situation praying that God will remove that cup from you? Above all, trust in God. I will never stop highlighting the importance of prayer. Pray all the time. Trust that there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God. Hold to that truth and know there is hope and a future.

Pilate marveled that Jesus did not answer or defend himself. I would encourage you this week to amaze people by not speaking angry words and remaining silent in adverse circumstances. When you are hurt, do not say things back just to hurt more. Refrain from those jokes that are not so pure or so innocent. Ephesians 5 says: Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. How about we have some practice doing that?

Yes, indeed, we try so many times to fight, to prove, to control. We do too little trusting the Spirit to lead, solve and guide.

We all know the chorus of hymn # 454

*Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit Divine!*

Let us pray in silence today.

