

## **I. Intro.: Denying Jesus – Turning your back on him**

### **A. Last week Pastor Velma drew us into the story of Peter’s agonizing fall from grace when he directly denied the Lord**

1. Velma helped us enter the story because it’s our story too, when time & again we are caught redhanded in our sin.
2. Amazingly, Jesus receives us back w/ forgiveness & restoration, just as he did Peter.

### **B. Now the story of Jesus in Passion Week continues where we left off last week**

1. It was Thursday late, late at night, after Jesus was arrested in the Gethsemane olive grove.
2. In the wee hours of the morning, he had been subjected to a mockery of a trial before the illegally convened Sanhedrin Jewish council & the chief priests.
3. While these leaders condemned Jesus for blasphemy, out in the courtyard Peter had three times denied knowing Jesus.

## **II. Today’s part of the story literally begins on a new day**

### **A. By 6:00 in the morning they consider the night has passed and it’s now Friday morning.**

1. Seeking the death penalty for Jesus, the chief priests and council agree to send him to the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, who happens to be in Jerusalem to keep order over the Passover crowds
2. The Jewish leaders have Jesus bound and send him under guard across the city to where Pilate is staying.
3. A crowd of Jewish people is there along with the chief priests. The latter make many false accusations against Jesus.
4. So Pilate, undoubtedly grumpy from being disturbed first thing in the morning by a group of Jewish leaders, he comes out to settle this matter.

### **B. This is essentially a second trial for Jesus.**

1. There are many things we could examine in this passage, but this morning I’m especially focusing on the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 verses of Mk. 15 – Jesus’ brief personal exchange with the man who holds the power of his life or death.

2. Following up on a charge he has surely heard from the chief priests, he asks Jesus pointblank, “So are you the king of the Jews?”

### **C. Right here it’s important that we pause and recognize several significant things in the wording of these few verses**

1. 1<sup>st</sup>, I would probably correct myself in the way Pilate asked Jesus the question

- a) We should probably hear more of a mocking tone from Pilate, like, “Are YOU the king of the Jews?”
- b) After all, he’s looking down upon a Jewish peasant from the backwaters of Galilee, already beaten, bloodied and bound, standing powerless before the most powerful man in the whole region
- c) Seeing the man in front of him, Pilate probably thought this charge was patently ridiculous

2. 2<sup>nd</sup> thing to note is that the capital charge brought against Jesus changed from the 1<sup>st</sup> trial to the 2<sup>nd</sup> trial

- a) In Mk. 14:61, the high priest asks Jesus, “Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?” This was a religious charge, which had blasphemy written all over it.
- b) But before Pilate, Jesus is asked if he is the king of the Jews ... To Roman ears, king was a political and not a religious charge ...
- c) The Romans didn’t care if someone offended Jewish sensitivities by claiming to be a divine savior figure. But to claim to be any kind of king within the Roman Empire, well that could get you killed.

3. A 3<sup>rd</sup> thing to note also comes in that phrase “King of the Jews” but here the emphasis is not on “king” but on “of the Jews”

- a) This also has political meaning, since in this story only the Romans would use that phrase “king of the Jews”. Jewish people themselves would not have used those words.
- b) Take a look farther along in the crucifixion story in Mk. 15:32 where the chief priests and scribes are mocking Jesus on the cross. There they say, “Let the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down now, so that we may see and believe.”
- c) The Jewish people well remembered their former independent state of Israel. But to the Romans, you couldn’t call Jesus “King of Israel” because Israel did not exist as an independent state
- d) So Pilate’s charge “king of the Jews” branded Jesus as a revolutionary, making him a threat to Rome. The chief priests knew very well this is the kind of charge they had to bring to Pilate in order to get the death penalty.

#### 4. There's a 4<sup>th</sup> thing to notice when Pilate interrogates Jesus. We might want to retranslate what Jesus says in 15:2

- a) Literally from the Greek, Jesus says to Pilate only two words: “YOU say,” when asked if he was king of the Jews
- b) The NIV makes it sound as if Jesus definitely agrees with Pilate, by translating it “Yes, it is as you say”. But that's overstating it
- c) A better translation is the NRSV: “You say so”, but even that implies Jesus is agreeing with him. In reality, Jesus avoids a definite response

Like other times when he was put on the spot, Jesus is deliberately evasive here. He neither confirms nor denies it.

Perhaps the best rendering I've found is in The Message, where Jesus responds to Pilate: “If you say so.” This could be either submissive or flippant

- d) Clearly there is truth to the charge of his being King of the Jews, but Jesus knew that his kingdom was not of this world, and that it was not the kind of kingdom either Pilate or his accusers understood.

- e) In these few exchanges between Jesus & Pilate, there's political gamesmanship going on

Jesus knows the cards are all stacked against him

He still maintains his Jewish identity & doesn't just cower in the face of Pilate's lethal authority

### III. But strangely he doesn't speak up, either

#### A. From this point on, Mark tells us Jesus says nothing in response to the false charges against him

- 1. He is silent, to the amazement of Pilate!
- 2. Why is Jesus silent? And what do we make of his silence?

**B. Famed Scottish pastor and New Testament interpreter William Barclay identified 5 different kinds of silence, which could be more eloquent than words** (William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, rev. ed., Daily Study Bible Series, Westminster Pr, ©1975, p. 355)

- 1. There is the silence of *wondering admiration*

- a) Sometimes the greatest appreciation after a concert or performance comes not in thunderous applause, but in the silence that says, “We have been in the presence of greatness
- b) Sometimes when we witness something amazing or profound, no words can be found and silence is the most appropriate response

## 2. There is the silence of *contempt*

- a) Sometimes when we say nothing, we communicate that we believe the other person's questions or arguments are not even worth responding to
- b) Refusing to answer can easily be interpreted as contempt, which is what Pilate may have assumed Jesus was doing.

## 3. There is the silence of *fear*

- a) Sometimes we are silent just because we are afraid to speak
- b) Fear and cowardice can paralyze us & prevent us from saying what we know ought to be said

## 4. There is the silence of *the heart that is hurt*

- a) Sometimes we are so deeply wounded that it takes us beyond protests and angry words.
- b) The deepest sorrow goes past any rebuke or any words of justification at all ... Like Job in the Old Testament, when his friends first arrived, there were no words to speak or to hear in their presence, only silence

## 5. And finally, there is the silence of *tragedy*

- a) This is when there are no more words to be said, because anything said would be pointless and simply fall on deaf ears.
- b) This was the silence of Jesus, because he knew that neither Pilate nor the Jewish leaders would ever understand his kind of kingdom
- c) He knew that the lines of communication were already broken, and that anything he said would be further twisted & used against him

### **C. It's important we recognize that this was not a passive, do-nothing silence**

1. Jesus answered Pilate on his own terms, not on the terms Pilate expected, which simply confounded the Governor.
2. The silence of Jesus here in the face of a death sentence against him was a silence of strength not of weakness.
  - a) In the garden he showed he really didn't want to endure this suffering
  - b) Yet he still trusted his heavenly father to provide for him even through this ordeal

### **IV. So the amazing silence of Jesus in the face of such injustice begs a question: *Is this a model for how we should respond to evil or injustice?***

## **A. More specifically, we might ask, “When do we speak up against injustice, and when do we shut up?”**

1. I’m sorry I don’t have a formula or easy answer to give you ... All I can say is that it calls for spiritual discernment and eyes to see what kind of resistance God is calling for.

2. there are biblical examples to be given for both responses.

a) The most obvious and powerful example for suffering silence is Jesus himself in the text we just examined.

b) But there are at least 2 O.T. examples that are very parallel to Jesus’ situation

1<sup>st</sup> is Isaiah 53:7, which we also heard this morning, referring to God’s servant suffering silently. This has long been seen by Christians as pointing ahead toward Jesus

For another example, turn in your Bibles to Psalm 38:11-14

*(a) Read aloud*

(b) There is clearly parallelism between what the Psalmist is describing and what Jesus experienced

3. But the Bible also shows us people who loudly protested injustices, people who did not silently accept their suffering

a) Think about Job, for after that initial silence with his friends, there are long chapters full of Job arguing his case & passionately proclaiming his innocence

b) The prophet Jeremiah, also, complained and protested the way he was mistreated for proclaiming the word of the LORD

c) Even Jesus himself was not always silent: remember how in John chapter 2 he entered the temple courts and overturned all the tables of the moneychangers, when he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my father’s house into a market!”

## **B. Just this week I saw TMail (the weekly email bringing selected stories from the magazine *The Mennonite*) It caught my attention w/ 3 articles highlighting current stories of suffering and injustice**

1. and with each article I could think of an example of someone facing that suffering silently, or facing it with strong prophetic words

2. In one article Vic Stoltzfus, father of our former pastor Tina Schlabach, reflected on the famous march in Selma 50 years ago for voting rights for black people, in which he also personally marched

- a) Throughout the civil rights movement of the 1960s, there were many instances, like at Selma, which called for public vocal resistance to legalized discrimination
- b) Much closer to home & very current, the Goshen Community Relations Commission just passed a resolution which will now go to the City Council. The resolution officially acknowledges and laments Goshen's past status as a “sundown town” where African-Americans were expected to get out of town before sundown
- c) But sometimes there can be a verbally quieter resistance, such as Sunday, Dec. 14 when I and some others here joined churches across the country to wear black clothes in solidarity that “black lives matter”, in the face of so many deaths of African-Americans at the hands of police

### 3. Another TMail article highlighted the plight of many undocumented people in the United States, facing the threat of sudden deportation and the breaking up of families

- a) Especially prominent is the case of Mennonite pastor Max Villatoro, who pastors a Hispanic congregation in Iowa City, IA.

On March 3, Max was abruptly taken from his home for probable deportation to his native Honduras.

Youtube videos are circulating now from his wife Gloria and from Central Plains Mennonite Conference officials pleading to immigration & customs officials for mercy, to not deprive a family of its husband and father, and a church of its pastor

- b) But on a quieter note, I'm also reminded of the countless times silent suffering is lived out locally when our own Latino neighbors (whether undocumented or not) are ignored & discriminated against in our local community

### 4. A third TMail article made note of the painful & difficult issue of people who have been sexually abused by pastors and church leaders

- a) The vocal resistance to these injustices has come into prominence recently by the brave perseverance over many years of women who were victimized by former seminary professor John Howard Yoder. At great cost to their own reputations, these women did not remain silent.
- b) The TMail article also showed a way of quieter resistance to such suffering. Mennonite Church USA is now opening up a Care and Prevention Fund.

The majority of contributions collected by this fund will go to assist people who have suffered abuse by a credentialed leader of MCUSA and who have experienced significant financial cost as they sought healing.

Contributions to the fund are welcomed thru Aug. 31.

## **V. (Conclusion)**

### **A. In the last few weeks in our worship, we've seen unfold the greatest injustice ever perpetrated on any human being**

1. On behalf of a religious people, Pilate passed a death sentence on a righteous man who not only had committed no crime worthy of death, but in fact had committed no sin at all
2. But perhaps the most amazing thing in this story is how that righteous man Jesus failed to directly answer a question that could have saved his hide

a) And then, he just stopped answering altogether. As our prelude song this morning put it, he never said a mumblin' word

### **B. Although we humans may look the other way, God never ignores or dismisses evil & injustice**

1. We may not understand why God doesn't directly intervene to right the wrongs, but the heart of God weeps right along with those who are weeping.
2. God calls for responses from us when we become aware of suffering and injustice

a) It may be a very active verbal, even public response to the suffering.

b) Or at times it may mean a verbally silent response which is still resistance, nonetheless

### **C. May God grant us the courage not to shrink from a response but to discern what kind of response is fitting in the moment and with the resources we have.**