

"As Against a Robber"

The recent BART shooting in Oakland where then police officer Johannes Mehserle shot and killed Oscar Grant has caused quite a lot of uproar recently. There have been a number of protests, some sadly violent ones. Of course the case is under trial right now and so I won't weigh in on what may or may not have been going on in Mehserle's mind during the incident. But I want to think for a moment about the protests. What are people upset about? Well, the concern is about injustice. The concern is that an officer of the law unjustly killed someone.

You see, injustice sparks something inside us, doesn't it? It can make us angry and furious. Or it can make us sad and heartbroken. We know instinctively injustice is a bad thing. When someone goes free who is guilty, we get angry. When someone who is innocent is incorrectly condemned, we get sad. When someone's punishment doesn't measure up with their crime, we notice it. Injustice bothers us, and it should. Remember, we are made in the image of God. God is fully just. And so our innate sense of justice flows from the fact that we were created in God's image. And of course, when humans pervert justice, that stems from the fact that all humans have fallen in sin and marred the image of God that is in us. But we still are created in the image of God, even though it's been marred with sin. Humans still have some inner desire for justice, don't we?

Our passage for today is a story about an arrest. One who is allegedly a transgressor of the law is arrested. One who is treated like a rebel or robber is arrested. The sinless Jesus is arrested. He's betrayed by one of his friends. He's handed over to the local Jewish authorities, who of course happened to also be the local religious authorities, the chief priests, scribes, and elders. Of course, at his arrest, we don't hear any charges at this point; those will come later at his trial. We don't hear any rights read to him; at that time and context he probably didn't have too many. If it hasn't hit you yet, I hope his arrest begins to strike you for the injustice that it was.

But let's look further at his arrest. The chief priests, scribes, and elders arrive it says in verse 43 with a multitude. With an *armed* crowd. They had both swords and clubs. The religious leaders who had been plotting to get rid of Jesus have found their opportunity to arrest him without hopefully causing an uproar among the people who loved Jesus. And to arrest him, they brought a show of force. John's account of this event describes this armed crowd as consisting of both Jewish temple police and some Roman soldiers (John 18:3). This would have been an interesting coalition. It couldn't have been too big of a force lest they attract the very sort of attention that they were hoping to avoid from the people. But it had to be a big enough force to warrant the description given in the gospels as this armed crowd of both Roman and Jewish forces.

And it wasn't just a big show of force when they arrested Jesus. It was also something secretive and covert. We read here in verse 44 that the religious leaders had planned everything ahead of time with Judas and the officers. Judas gave the officers very specific instructions. He established this signal that he would kiss Jesus to identify him, and then they were to immediately grab him. They had to take him at once safely according to verse 44. By the way, the idea in verse 44 about taking him away safely wasn't about Jesus' physical well being. The idea wasn't that they'd make sure nothing happened to Jesus in the process. The idea was that they'd securely take him away. Once the signal of the kiss was

given, the officers were to pounce and take Jesus away. It needed to be a swift, in and out, sort of operation. Jesus must not escape. There could be no mistakes.

And so here everything was all setup just right to arrest Jesus. With the combination of a show of force and a secret plan to make the arrest quick and smooth, the coalition showed up. They executed the plan. Before you know it, Jesus in verse 46 is under arrest. And yet look at Jesus' initial response. He made no struggle. He did not join in with the one disciple is taking up arms against them. He didn't call his disciples to fight.

No, he responded in peace. Just look at Jesus' words. Verse 48. "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take me?" The word for robber here could also be translated rebel or insurrectionist. I like how one commentator put it: they used swords and clubs to subdue the Prince of Peace. Why was such force needed? And why the secrecy? Jesus points out in verse 49, that he was with them daily in the temple, but they did not take him then. No, this was the hour of darkness. This was when sin and injustice reigned. Surely the same emotions that we have over injustice must have rose up in Jesus at that moment. What did this show of force and this covert operation suggest about Jesus? What message did it send to him? How would you have felt if you were Jesus? Surely it was injustice. Jesus was being falsely accused as a criminal, and some dangerous one at that. But how does Jesus respond? How does he handle the very swell of emotions inside him that screamed injustice? He responded in peace. He allowed himself to be arrested; to be treated as a sinner. As a breaker of the law. As a transgressor.

We ourselves get upset when we see someone innocent falsely accused. That's injustice. Well, that's what happened here to Jesus. The sinless Messiah who had went around teaching God's Word and healing people, was arrested. The innocent was treated as a transgressor. And yet who are the real transgressors in this story? Basically, everyone else. Let's systematically run down the list of everyone in this passage.

First you have the religious leaders with their armed multitude. These chief priests, scribes, and elders were the rulers of the people. These would have been representatives of the local Jewish ruling body called the Sanhedrin. And what do you think their job was supposed to be? Well, they were to rule. But in their case, their rule was only somewhat political. Their rule was particularly religious. They were the religious leaders of the people.

Notice one of the three groups were the "elders." We ordained and installed a new elder ourselves last week. When we did that, we looked at Hebrews 13 about the responsibility of the elders as rulers in the church. Ultimately we said that for the New Testament church, the elders were responsible to protect the message of Jesus Christ. The elder's job was to protect the one true faith from other strange teachings. The elders needed to keep proclaiming the one true Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But what about these elders here in our passage, and the other Jewish religious leaders? Were they protecting the people under their care? They might have thought so. But they were obviously wrong. Instead of doing what they should have been doing, they did the opposite. As the religious leaders, they more than anyone should have been on the watch for the Messiah. They should have known more than anyone what the Messiah would look like when he came. They should have been the first to welcome the Christ. But instead, they are the leaders in his opposition. They pervert justice in order to arrest and condemn Jesus. They may have really thought Jesus was a transgressor, but in reality, it was they who were the real transgressors. They had failed in their responsibility to lead the people religiously. Instead of protecting them from

false teachings, they gave the worst false teaching. They denied that Jesus was the Christ.

Look at the next person in this passage. Judas. He too is a transgressor. Judas has two labels given to him in this passage. Mark describes Judas in two ways, and that says everything. The first label is in verse 43. Judas, it says, is "one of the twelve." Earlier in this chapter Jesus had predicted that he'd be betrayed by someone close to him. He specifically said in verse 20 of this chapter, that it'd be "one of the twelve." Here Mark reminds us of that prediction when Jesus is arrested. This armed coalition is headed up by Judas, Judas who was one of the twelve disciples. One of Jesus' inner circle.

The second label given to Judas is in the next verse, verse 44. He is simply identified at this point as the "betrayer." His name fell to the background. His identity was in the horrible action that he was there to do. He now became identified with it. He was the "betrayer." This is the last identification of Judas in the book of Mark. He's the "betrayer." That's his legacy, so to speak.

But he does have one final act, and that's the betrayal itself. In verse 45, he betrays his Lord with a kiss, and with the greeting of "Rabbi," which was a title of honor given to teachers. His parting actions to his Lord only seals his betrayal. He betrays him through the deceptive act of a friendly greeting. The betrayer comes up and greets the Lord just like you'd expect someone to honorably greet their teacher at that time. But it was all a front. It was all part of the secret plan to quickly arrest Jesus. It was all a lie. And for Judas, this shows that he too is a transgressor. He was a transgressor, having betrayed not only his close friend, not only his teacher whom he should have honored, but the lord of Lords and king of Kings.

The next transgressors to note in this passage are in verse 50. "They all forsook him and fled." Yes, that's right. His own disciples. The eleven remaining disciples all turned and ran when the "cops" showed up. None of them stood by Jesus. They all turned tail and ran. This lack of loyalty in light of who Jesus is would have been wrong any way you looked at it. But it was especially bad since Jesus had just predicted to them that this would happen, and they each had in turn vowed loyalty. The fleeing disciples were also transgressors. They were guilty of deserting and forsaking the Christ, not to mention breaking their vows.

There were two apparently valiant attempts in our passage, however, and yet in each, they both show that they are still transgressors as well. The first person is in verse 47. Someone with Jesus drew a sword and tried to fight. He cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. John's account tells us that this was Peter. It may have been a valiant gesture, but it was not long lived. Jesus didn't condone the response, and instead responded with peace. He pointed out to the armed force that they weren't mounting some political rebellion, but were peaceably teaching in front of them all the time. And so Peter's response may have had the right intention, but it was the incorrect response. Jesus peacefully surrendered to the armed force. Frankly, Jesus' peaceful surrender brings out the injustice of this situation all the more. But it also put's Jesus' own preaching into practice, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44).

As Jesus had already told them, this was his mission and destiny. Jesus would be delivered over to the religious leaders. There was a way that Peter could have stood by Jesus while following Jesus' lead. If Jesus wanted him to take up arms and defend him, then that order should have come from Jesus. If you've been in the military before, you know how that works. If you break rank and open fire without your superior's orders, that can end you up with a court martial. You'd be a

transgressor. And that's what Peter was here. He too was a transgressor. He didn't see Jesus' mission properly. He didn't follow Jesus' lead. He incorrectly addressed the injustice here. And in the end, he's also one of the ones that turned and fled in verse 50. Though of course to Peter's credit, we'll see next week that he would soon regain some courage and begin to follow from a distance, that of course, just before he would then deny Jesus three times. But my point for this passage is that Peter too shows himself to be a transgressor despite his misplaced attempts at being a hero.

The last transgressor is in verses 51-52. He's the second one who appears valiant at first. You see in verse 50, it says that all forsook him and fled. But then Mark takes us to a specific detail and to a specific person. In verse 51, Mark draws our attention to a very mysterious young man. We don't know anything about this young man, except for what we are told here. In fact, none of the other gospel accounts tell us anything of such a young man. All we know about him is right here in these two verses. You can imagine that there has been a lot of speculation about who this young man is. The best guess is that it was the author himself. Mark was not one of the official twelve disciples, but it's believed he was a follower of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Some have even speculated that it was Mark's home in Jerusalem that the Last Supper was just held at. If this was Mark, it was his small way to put his own mark into the Gospel. But at the end of the day, we don't know.

And yet these short two verses gives us some important insight into what went on. You see, after verse 50 tells us about how everyone fled, we might have wondered what would have happened to the disciples if they really did stick around; if they didn't turn cowardly and flee. Well, this young man, at least for a moment, didn't flee. It says in verse 51 that he tried to follow behind them. But what happened? Well, the man was seized. The armed guard saw him and tried to capture him. Well, for whatever reason, he had almost nothing on, and he was able to escape by wriggling out of his single garment and fleeing. And so at the end of the day he fled like the rest. But in his attempt to follow behind for a moment, it seems that he too would have been arrested and detained along with Jesus. Everyone had fled out of a real threat to them to being arrested. But at the end of the day, even he still fled. This young man for a moment tried to follow along, but when push came to shove, he counted the cost, and decided against it. He didn't mind following Jesus to a point. But if he could get arrested, he wasn't willing to go that far. And he so he wriggled out, turned, and deserted the Lord. He wasn't willing to suffer with the Christ. As such, he too is a transgressor.

I hope my point here is clear. On the one hand, you have Jesus. Innocent and righteous. Not a transgressor, and yet here arrested like one. On the other hand, you see how everyone else in this passage really are transgressors. This passage has story after story of groups of people whose sins come to a climax here in how they respond to Jesus at this crucial moment. Oh how true Jesus words were in our last passage, in verse 41. He was being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

So why did Jesus respond in this way? Why did he allow this injustice? Why did he not fight back like Peter, or at least try to wiggle free and run away like the poorly clothed young man? What was the reason for his response? He tells us in verse 49. In order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Which Scriptures did he have in mind? One that seems to especially ring true is Isaiah 53. That passage describes the suffering of the Messiah. Isaiah 53:12 says of the Messiah, "He was numbered with the transgressors." Scripture had promised that the Messiah would be counted along with the transgressors, treated like a criminal, even though he wasn't one. Surely that's part of what Jesus has in mind when he rebukes them in verse 48. When he says, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords

and clubs to take me?" But Jesus knew it must be so. His words of rebuke may not have been appreciated by all, but you think the religious leaders might have had a clue. There were supposed to know the Scriptures. Maybe Isaiah 53:12 rang into some of their minds as Jesus rebuked them.

Of course all of this was for a grand and marvelous purpose. God's plan to have the Messiah numbered among the transgressors was for a glorious reason. Let me read you more of Isaiah 53:12. It tells the reason why Jesus would be numbered among the transgressors. It says about the Messiah, "He poured out His soul unto death, And he was numbered with the transgressors, And he bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors."

Did you catch all of that? Jesus willingly took on this injustice to save us. Isaiah says he willingly was treated as a criminal, so that he could pour out his soul unto death. Why? To bear the sin of many. To make intercession for transgressors. For criminals. For rebels. For breakers of God's law. For people like the ones in our passage who are really transgressors. And for people like you and like me. For sinners who need salvation. For us with debts to God that need to be paid. Jesus bore the punishment of sin for many, on the cross. That is why he became like a transgressor here in our passage. That is why he was arrested. That is why he went peacefully. His reaction highlighted the very injustice that was going on here. And yet at the same time, it highlighted why he went willingly. To save transgressors like the ones in our passage, and like you and me. He took up on himself the injustice that we are so quick to do ourselves, so that justice could be served. The justice that was due upon us. So that he could take on our punishment. So we could be free!

You see, if we are not saved; if our sins have not been borne by Jesus on the cross, then we deserve judgment. That's justice. We deserve to be rounded up and judged on that great day of final judgment. Please know that that day will certainly come. On that day, there will be no injustice. Christ will be the mighty judge on that day. If he has not already granted you forgiveness of your sins on that day, then you will face eternal judgment. That's what Scripture describes as hell. It will be a terrible and awesome judgment. But the good news is that you can be set free from that future. You can be given the exact opposite. You can be given eternal resurrection life with God. You can be given eternal blessings. It's all a free gift offered to all humans; to all transgressors. Jesus says to take hold of that free gift by faith. Believe in him. Trust in that free gift. Turn from your old life characterized by transgressions and ask him to live inside you by his Spirit. Ask him for forgiveness and to live in your heart. And he will freely give that greatest of gifts to you. That's why he allowed himself in this passage to be numbered with the transgressors. Come in faith today. Believe in Jesus.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, this passage is the culmination of so many stories. For Jesus it was the culmination of everything he had been predicting to his disciples - that he would be arrested, suffer, and die for the sins of God's people. All his predictions were beginning to come true with this arrest. But for all the transgressors in this story, it was also the culmination of their stories as well. Just think about the different groups. Throughout the gospel of Mark, we saw the religious leader's growing hatred of Jesus. They were looking more and more for a way to take him out. Here their story comes to a climax with the arrest of Jesus. For Judas, we had seen his story developing this chapter where he would betray Jesus. Here he betrays Jesus. For the disciples, we had seen in this chapter the developing story of how they would fall away from Jesus, and here they do just that. For Peter, we have seen in a number of chapters of his internal tension between wanting to stand up for a glorious Christ versus his uncertainty of

following a suffering Christ. He at first tries to stand up for what he wanted, willing to go out in glory at one moment, but then he too flees. Jesus' arrest here is a culmination of so many different people's stories, and sadly they all seem to climax in sin and rebellion against Jesus.

Each of these people's stories probably seemed so right in their own eyes. They probably each thought they were doing the right thing, that they were doing what they had to do. Just step into the shoes of each of them and ask how they saw things. And yet we can think we are so right, even while being wrong. If we step into the minds of the people in this passage, I'm sure each were convinced that they were doing the right thing. Each of their stories made sense in their own mind. But they got it wrong. Their stories and their sin each came to a climax by their rebellion here against Jesus.

Of course there is one person in this passage that we don't know his story. We don't know the story of this mysterious young man in verses 51-52. We don't know his story - but surely he had a story of his own. You have a story. We all have a story. Each of our lives are heading on a certain trajectory. Apart from Christ, Scripture tells us that we've been heading in the wrong direction. But the crucial question we must all ask is how will our story intersect with Christ? Even if you've come to that climactic point in your life where you have boldly acted directly against Jesus, directly rebelling against Christ, there is forgiveness in Jesus. Many of the people in this passage, who showed that they were transgressors, would go on to be restored by Jesus. Jesus would turn the whole direction of their lives around. They'd have new life in Jesus. Many of these would become some of the most devoted followers of Jesus. That is the call for each of us today. We are called to reflect on our story. And if our story is one of heading away from Jesus, he calls you to turn and return to him. Follow Jesus. Follow him by a life of faith in him, as his disciple.

And understand this - if we do this (this is for everyone - new Christian today or long time Christian), we should be prepared to count the cost. There's no cost for salvation. It's a free gift. But being identified with Jesus might have a cost involved. If the young man in our passage had not fled, but stood fast with Jesus, he might have gotten arrested and who knows what. We too, if we stand fast with Christ might share in his sufferings.

And yet I think the reality is that here in Marin we could very easily taste of Christian persecution, but in reality taste so little of it. You see, we are called to influence the culture around us with God's Word. But it's all too easy to be influenced by culture ourselves instead. Our culture is one that promotes tolerance. It tells us that there are so many ways we shouldn't talk about our religious views. What this means is that so often we just blend into our culture here. We end up not having to really "count the cost," because we follow polite society's way to not really talk about our faith, or to talk about it in such a way that people can say, "Well that's nice for you, I'm glad you found something that works for you." But how little do we return with, "No, please don't misunderstand me, this is something that you desperately need yourself. This isn't just something good for me, but something you need too!"

Now I'm not saying we should go around being arrogant and offensive just to turn people off and just to find persecution. I'm not saying that we should go looking for trouble. But I'm challenging us to break the social conventions when they hinder sharing the gospel. Our culture says, "You mind your business, and I'll mind mine." And so we just won't talk about certain things. We'll skip certain conversations. And so what I am challenging us to do, is to break that social convention. To actually tell *your* story - a story of a criminal and a transgressor

being saved by one who was treated like a criminal. And then call people to respond to this message.

I confess, this is convicting thing for me to say, because I too find this a hard thing to do. We've been trained by our culture to not stir up the waters. We walk on egg shells around people with our Christian testimony, afraid to offend someone, but what about offending our Lord? When we run away from telling our story and our testimony, we are essentially running away from the Lord. It's our own way in 2009 to flee the possible persecution that we could face, just like the disciples did back then. Instead, let's be thankful that at our current time, the possible persecution we might face is so much less than what they were up against back then. And so, yes, let's not be arrogant and offensive for the gospel. But let's do be confident and full of conviction as we share our stories of Christ in our lives. And let's do it in love, realizing that we are just one transgressor telling another transgressor where to find forgiveness and grace. In Jesus alone. Praise be to Him. Amen.

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