

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 26 Feb 2023
Services: *Across the diocese*
Series: Jesus Christ – death and resurrection
Title: Last Supper/Passover
Passage: Luke 22:1-23

For the past week or so, I have been watching a show on Netflix called ‘Physical 100’. It’s a Korean reality show in which contestants – all of whom are champion athletes in various disciplines - compete in a series of physical challenges to try and establish which of them is the fittest and strongest of them all.

Each challenge takes a different form – in one they are all holding on to a beam and the one who holds on the longest wins. In another, they have to team up to pull a 1 tonne ship across a room, and the team which is fastest wins.

The task will vary but the same basic structure applies to all of the challenges: the ones who win, survive. They continue on to another battle. And the ones who lose, are eliminated. In fact, their final scene sees them taking a sledgehammer to a plaster cast of their bodies on their way out. In other words, they destroy themselves to represent how they have been conquered by their opponent.

It’s very engrossing watching! Honestly, I have actually lost some sleep because of it – I have to watch to the end of each episode because I have to know who wins!

I mention it because our passage today also lays out a battle for us. It is also a meeting of powerful forces. It is also a battle to the death.

And the question it puts before us is: who will win? And how?

Now, I know that you know that in some way, the answer will be – God. Right? The answer is always God. But I hope you will allow this passage to surprise you in what it shows us about *how* God’s purposes are achieved and why.

Because the answer this passage will give us draws us into the heart of what we celebrate at Easter, the contradiction that is Easter: How it could be possible to *celebrate* a death. How we could call that Good News. And where we might be able to find Good news in our lives.

So let’s get into it.

22 Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, ²and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.

Our story starts with the Passover, verse 1 tells us. This traditional Jewish festival was a time of great significance. Hundreds of thousands of Jews would have come to Jerusalem to celebrate together, to remember the Exodus – the time God had freed his people from their oppression and slavery in Egypt, and to ask God to do something like that for them, in their circumstances.

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This time presents both an opportunity and a threat for Jesus' opponents.

They want to get rid of him, v. 2 says, but the fact that there are so many people in town is a problem for them. Jesus is popular – it's possible that he could persuade the crowds to support him.

They need a way to get to him, away from the people, away from any possible support. They need him at his most vulnerable.

This opportunity is presented to them by Judas.

V. 3 **³Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.**

⁴And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus.

⁵They were delighted and agreed to give him money. ⁶He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

When Luke mentions that Judas is 'one of the Twelve' he's not just catering to our short attention spans, he's not imagining that we have forgotten that Judas is one of Jesus' closest and longest-term followers and friends.

He's making a point, about exactly that – Jesus is about to be betrayed by a confidante. The very person Jesus has invited in to see the most intimate parts of his life. The very person Jesus has trusted with his message, with his company.

This person is going to betray him.

This is sinister enough, but Luke also mentions that Satan has 'entered Judas'.

This is not just a battle of humans to human, but it is also a cosmic, spiritual battle, a battle of evil versus good.

Satan has actually been waiting for this moment ever since he tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry – Luke 4:13 tells us 'When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.'

That opportune time has come.

So to sum it up, Jesus has the most powerful Jewish leaders, his closest friend, and his most evil enemy, all united in an effort to bring him down.

This is important to see – the odds are really stacked against Jesus at this point.

If just this part of the story was a heist movie, it would be incredibly boring – things have all fallen into place for the conspirators so easily.

And it leads us to expect, that if the set up was this easy, surely the take down will be the same?

Well, when we look at the next section, verses 7-13, we see that's not how it plays out.

Have a look: Verses 7-8 – The day of unleavened bread comes, and Jesus sends Peter and John to make preparations for how they will celebrate the Passover meal.

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Verses 9-12 detail all of Jesus' instructions to them – for the sake of time we won't go into them but you can read them yourself.

And Peter and John go, verse 13 tells us 'they found things just as Jesus had told them.'

In contrast to what the conspirators might have thought about the balance of power, here we see that Jesus is *entirely* in control of what is going to follow.

One commentator puts it well 'Jesus is himself an active agent in the events beginning to unfold. He is no helpless victim' – he is the one arranging everything to come. He knows exactly what is ahead, as verse 13 emphasises – everything is as Jesus said it would be.

If we are thinking about this image of a battle of titans, in which Jesus' opponents have made a first move, which looked decisive, here is a hint that Jesus has some moves up his sleeve too.

At the same time, it should strike us as we consider this scenario that this is quite a strange situation for Jesus to be engineering.

What I mean by that is this: Yes, things are working out exactly as Jesus said, but also Jesus seems to be setting things up exactly as *Judas and his co-conspirators wanted* – Jesus has set up a scenario which takes him away from the thing the Chief Priests and teachers of the law feared – the crowd which might have protected him.

What is he doing?

Let's look at what happens at this Passover meal, described in verses 14-20 - for the answer.

There are two major things Jesus wants to communicate with his apostles, and with us, over this meal.

1. The Passover

Firstly, by choosing the Passover as the time to tell his followers about his upcoming death, by indicating that this Passover meal will, as he says in verse 16 'find fulfillment in the kingdom of God' Jesus is saying that his death will be a new Passover sacrifice, resulting in a new Exodus.

In the original Passover, a lamb was slaughtered by every family who trusted in God, and the blood of that lamb was painted on their door frame. When the angel of the Lord came by them, he would 'pass over' them, sparing their first born son from a death that was otherwise certain.

And then in an act of great liberation, God led his people out from under Egypt's power, enabling them to be who they were always intended to be: His people, worshipping Him freely.

In verse 19 and 20 Jesus spells out that his upcoming death will achieve the same things – or actually an even more significant salvation.

'And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying "This is my body, given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

'In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

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Notice that in both verses Jesus uses the same phrase 'for you' – his body is given 'for you' and his blood is 'poured out for you'.

This is the language of substitution – it is on our behalf that Jesus will die. It is in our place, that Jesus will die.

He will be sacrificed, so we can be spared.

And this will create a new covenant – a new agreement, a new unity – between us and God. No longer will we be alienated from him, enemies of his, but we will be his family, his friends.

Jesus will be the sacrifice the people need.

That's the first thing Jesus is communicating with this meal.

And **secondly**, that this is the purpose of God: v. 22:

²²The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!"

It is God's plan that Jesus will 'go' – or die, in other words. This doesn't make his betrayal right – in fact Jesus says 'woe to the man who betrays him.'

But it does mean that even this wrong is somehow within God's power, and God's plans.

I mentioned earlier that I love this show Physical 100.

That part of what makes it such compelling TV is that it depicts a battle that only one can win. If you lose the battle, you are out.

If you win, you are in.

And I said that our passage depicts another – arguably more serious - battle: Satan against God. Judas against Jesus. The leaders of Israel versus the saviour of the world.

But I want to point out to you something very significant. It is the key to this passage.

What is remarkable about what it depicts is that Jesus' upcoming loss is *also* his victory.

Jesus *wins* - by losing.

God's plans are continued not because He is able to stop Judas from doing what he does, or because He stops the Chief Priests from opposing Jesus – but *because he does not*.

Jesus' victory will be in his death.

He will achieve everything he has set out to, through his suffering and death.

His degree of control over this situation is so great that it encompasses *even the work of his enemies*.

In fact, his enemies are unwittingly playing into his hands.

They think they are the masterminds of this assassination plot, but they are merely playing their role in a script that God himself has written.

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Yes, his enemies will succeed (at least, as they measure success) – they will capture Jesus, torture and mock him, and he will die.

But what they won't know or understand is that is *exactly* what God intends.

And so ultimately they will fail.

They will not have achieved what they hope – to establish themselves as the representatives of God, to hold all the religious power to themselves, to humiliate Jesus and prove him wrong.

Instead, *Jesus* will achieve everything he intended – he will die to spare us from death, he will be poured out for us so that God can pour out his mercy on us, he will be betrayed by a friend in order to turn us from enemies to friends, making an everlasting covenant with us.

It is worth thinking about what this means for your life

Can God's plans be interrupted? Can His purposes fail?

The 'good' Christian answer is 'of course not!'

And yet how often and how quickly do we doubt that God could be at work for our good and His when things go wrong for us?

When we lose a job, or a relationship, or a dream, how quickly do we see that as God's failure to act, protect, guide?

How hard is it for us to believe that God might have a better plan, and that He is playing that out in our lives?

This is entirely natural. When these things happen, all we can see is what has gone wrong, what we have lost.

And that is why we need Easter – we need to remember that what the cross tells us is that even in the worst of circumstance, that God is at work for the best, and that we can trust Him with our lives.

God thank you for your victory over your enemies, over death, over our sin and our rejection of you. Thank you, Jesus, that you took on the cost of all of those things in your body in your death. Thank you that through you we can be made right with you and our enmity can be turned to friendship. Thank you that you were willing to be poured out for us, and we ask that this Easter and in the Lenten season as we remember those things, that we would be led to deeper trust in you. Amen
