

DO YOU SEE THE HERO IN THE NARRATIVE OF LIFE?

Matthew 27:11-31

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

March 25, 2020 – Midweek Lent 5

Isn't life best when the hero and the hero moments are obvious? I was a high school junior; my sister in the 8th grade. Rhoda could take care of herself, no doubt about that--but THIS kid was bigger and older, and she was tired of being harassed on the walk home from school. I waited two blocks away on Western Avenue in Watertown, knowing the spot where the kid typically appeared. All of a sudden there he was, shoving her into a snowbank! Like a knight in shining armor I came racing in for the hero moment...and it worked out pretty well! I did not sin in the process and I think I gave him a little Jesus. It is fun when the hero & the hero moments are obvious!

Where is the hero in the narrative of life this day? And some of us are thinking, "Oh, here we go again! COVID-19 grabs yet another sound byte of life! Every conversation!" Are our minds and hearts are fighting negativity? Do we wish the sun would shine just a bit MORE into the statistics and growing darkness. Maybe you are tired of hunkering down in one way or another—by government order—and you would just like some hope!

Well, there IS a Knight in shining armor this day, but thanks be to God it is NOT me! The Spirit of God steps into our lives with Matthew 27:11-31 and whispers into our ears this question, *"Do You See the Hero in the Narrative of Life?"*

1. He Understands the Anguish in the Darkness

A. "You Are NOT a Very Impressive God!"

Did Jesus and his disciples leave Satan behind in the upper room the night before Jesus died? Satan is not mentioned again in the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth after these words in Luke 22 from the upper room: *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."*

Do you think Satan was lurking in the courtyard of Caiaphas and in the judgment hall of Pilate—in full view of Jesus? Luke tells us after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness at the start of his ministry that *"when the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time."* I think it is safe to say that Satan was present in the background of our reading! What do you think he whispered into Jesus' ear? **"You are NOT a very impressive God!** You are betrayed by your pastors and by your people and by your friends. If you were truly a God that people *WANTED*, wouldn't they BE HERE for you in your weakness?!"

Satan's temptation had some "teeth", don't you think? Jesus saw the reality and the darkness that was coming! He acknowledged it before Pilate when asked if he was a king! *"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants (do YOU see any?) would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."*

B. “You Are NOT a Very Impressive King!”

Dear friends, Satan is all about growing the darkness and he must have pounced! The Apostle Peter knew Satan well and he warns us in his first letter, **“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”** On Good Friday, was Satan a roaring lion, or was he the cat playing with a mouse? **“And you are NOT a very impressive king either! Here you are, tied up like a lamb on a pole for sacrifice, submissive before a petty king who has NO backbone to DO the right thing on behalf of YOU, his Creator God? You are NOT a very impressive king! Your church and your creation are about to feed you to my darkness! ‘Crucify’ will echo in your ears in a few moments as they strip you naked, mock your kingship, spit in your face, beat you with a staff, and lead you to your death, O King of the Jews!”**

Satan LOVES to create the darkness hoping that we will lose the Hero in the narrative!

APPLICATION Are WE in danger of losing the Hero in our present narrative? Doubting his ability to help and even his motive behind it all? “What kind of life is this for us to be living?! What is God thinking, if there is one?! Impending doom growing exponentially with the numbers on the screen! The tidal wave still to come? And our nation’s leadership—not enough! Politics--ridiculous! World intrigue?! Who knows? Tens of thousands dying...100,000 before it’s done?! Where is God in all of this? You Christians say he is a loving King! You quote those words, **‘we know that in all things God is at work for the good of those who love him.’** Christian, explain yourself! Explain your God! I do not see your King!”

Pilate didn’t see him either. “Are YOU the king of the Jews?”

2. He Owned the Darkness to Bring Us Peace

A. The Father Spoke Into Darkness

Was the darkness in control on the day that Jesus stood before Pilate, or was the darkness simply playing into God’s hands? You see the “*unseen hero*”, don’t you, even as the *true enemy* was unseen—not obvious yet deadly? The hero IS *visible* if one knows his voice and pays attention.

But what WAS the *true* darkness in the hall of Pilate? The hatred for and the death of the Son of God that God just “let happen”? What IS the true darkness of Coronavirus 2020? The hand-of-God-to-help “holding back” while 1000s die?

It was the Creator who told his creatures in love, **“The day you eat of the tree—claiming to know better how to run the world—the day you eat of the tree you will die. Death will be eternal in hell, and physical into the grave—and death will darken the whole of human life! But hear my heart and my voice and my promise. I will send an offspring of the woman—to be your hero in your darkest hour...”**

Did not Jesus himself say, ***“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. I have come that you may have life and have it to the full”?***

B. The Son Became Its Light

Do you see the Light standing in the darkness before Pilate in the person of Jesus Christ? The darkness wanted its way, to snuff out the Light, but faith—God’s gift--can cut through the darkness and allow us to SEE and to HEAR the hand of God!

“I AM the King of the Jews, Pilate. I will own the title and the questionable nature of what you see. In fact, you would have NO power over me if it were not given you from above. My Father has his purpose in all of this...even in the dream he gave to your wife.”

Do you think anyone IN THE MOMENT remembered these words of Jesus loved by so many? ***“I am the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*** He guides it all.

In a way, then, it sounds like an overstatement when the Spirit of God says, ***“Then they led him away to crucify him.”*** The fact is, the God-Man allowed them to lead him...light in the darkness! Can you hear the Father’s voice echoing into the moment? ***“I will put enmity between you, Satan, and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, though you will strike his heel.”***

Sin and its curse called for a hero, and the Son of God had raised his hand to BE that hero. Hebrews 10 records the conversation. ***“Father, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Here I am—it is written about me the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.”***

Even Jesus’ disciples did not see the Light in this Son of God until *AFTER* he rose from the dead. His resurrection to life frees us from our greatest darkness--death and personal guilt and our fear of seeing God! The loving Creator DID what it took to free us from the darkness! He sent his Son to own our darkness, to own our sin, that Jesus might BE the Light in the darkness! Easter is the Father’s voice to his world: ***“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** We are privileged to share that light no matter the darkness.

APPLICATION In our circumstances, is it not good to remember that God regularly speaks into his world through his physical creation, whether through the beauty of his stars or the power of the earthquake? He darkened the sun the day Jesus died—putting the world on notice. He shook the earth the day Jesus died—putting the world on notice. He covered the world in water putting the world on notice. He predicts wars and rumors of war and earthquakes and famines in various place—putting the world on notice. **COVID-19?** BUT, know that in his heart, the *TRUE* purpose of that “notice” is NOT fear and death, but repentance and faith, faith and life. For God did not make us for HERE and for sin; he made us for himself. God did not make us to die in our sins; he made us to live with him forever. He IS speaking to his world...

When he sent his Son at Christmas, a star in the heavens and angels in the sky got his creation buzzing! When his Son rose from the dead, *there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled back the stone and sat on it.* In a very real sense, God's creation speaks and his servants step up to point to the Son of God as this world's light! That is WHY we so love Christmas and Easter. For life is best when the hero and the hero moments are obvious! But let us never doubt that the hero is here in the picture, even when the darkness seems strong!

CONCLUSION Do you think in our present narrative that Satan forgets that he is defeated—our sin is paid for in the blood of Jesus and God's justice is satisfied—even as he “spins” Coronavirus as an “injustice of the Creator”?! Oh, Satan has NOT forgotten! He knows he has lost the war, but he SO wants to hurt us still as he hates our God! By faith you and I see through the darkness of Good Friday and in the end we will see the hero in our present narrative. May we always listen to his voice in the darkness. May we always share his voice into the darkness. For God WILL bring his children safely to his side...just as he promised. For we HAVE a hero—he is the King of the Jews! Amen

Prepared by Pastor Nate Strobel
414-422-0320, ext. 293
nstrobel@stpaulmuskego.org