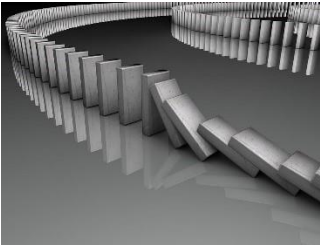


Irresistible Forces
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Lent
Sermon Text: Luke 22:47-53



While He was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss Him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" ⁴⁹ And when those who were around Him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And He touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and

officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against Him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?" ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Reports from war or from prison horrify us again and again about what ordinary people are capable of. A psychologist, who wanted to research criminals, made a surprising observation to explain the behavior of prison guards during war. His opinion is that a person's personality isn't the determining factor of brutality but that the conditions of war lead to it. This is not a new discovery. The Second World War also showed that ordinary people are capable of anything when under the influence of authorities and groups. In the Passion narrative, we also see how people are under tremendous pressure to do evil. And the question that we ask ourselves today is this: How can we be saved from this tremendous pressure of evil? Contrary to the findings of many intelligent people, the Bible tells us that evil comes not only from the situation, but that evil is within each one of us. So this question is even more important: How can I be saved from the evil that is within me? The name for this Sunday helps with this. Today we celebrate "Okuli" and this Latin word is derived from Psalm 25:15 – "My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He will pluck my feet out of the net." The opposite can also be true, it can mean that our eyes turn away from the Lord and thus come under the sway of forces that we can no longer influence. In the Passion narrative, all of this is presented to us. Especially in today's sermon text which tells about the betrayal of Judas – and not just Judas but the other disciples also capitulated in different ways to the compulsion of violence and got sucked into the pull of evil. Let's take a look then at these people.

First of all, we meet the Jewish leaders. They were motivated by fear. They were afraid of the people. Because of this fear and for fear that a revolution would unleash the power of the Roman government upon them, they decided to kill Jesus. Fear drove these people to such an extent that everything else was lost from sight. The Jewish Passover should have been celebrated at that time. The Passover was to remind the people of Israel how God rescued them from Egypt. At that time, the people painted their door posts with the blood of the Passover lamb so that the angel of death would pass over the houses of the Israelites without bringing death upon them. All of this was to be remembered by the Israelites. So it was a festival of salvation. And we ask ourselves, how could these people be so blind as to celebrate God's festival of salvation by killing the Savior of the world? And at the same time, we ask ourselves, can it be that we want to proclaim the Savior of the world, while our motivation and concentration are elsewhere? Perhaps even overlooking the Savior of the world altogether, obscuring His importance or replacing it with human morality? And then Judas came up with the plan. Judas betrayed Jesus. But why? He belonged to Jesus. He was with Him from the beginning. He experienced Jesus' miracles, His sermons, His love. Why did he now want to kill Jesus? Did he want to force Jesus to reveal Himself as a political Messiah? Did his greed for money seize him so thoroughly that he would throw away everything that he had experienced with Jesus for just a little bit of money? Or has he completely fallen under Satan's control? Whatever happened, Judas averted his gaze from Jesus. And because he turned his gaze away from Jesus, other things suddenly became much more important to him than Jesus. All of this came to a head in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas came to Jesus with all the power of the government. He could have pointed a finger at Jesus and said: "There He is!" Or he could have simply slapped Jesus. What is difficult to understand is that Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, of all things. Even Jesus asked with surprise: "Judas, would you betray Me with a kiss?" What kind of human disappointment lies behind this? Jesus must have thought: "someone who was close to Me, someone

who was among those I called Mine, doesn't have the courage to openly say what the matter is, but betrays Me with an intimate sign of affection!"

Then we get to the disciples. They are completely overwhelmed with everything that is happening. They had just heard about Peter's denial and Judas' betrayal. They too admit defeat under the weight of the events. While they were just falling into deep sleep out of grief and anguish, loud soldiers were suddenly standing around them. Jesus had, of course, announced all of this before but they still couldn't believe it. In such situations, one may do something purely as a reactionary response. That's probably what happened with Peter. Peter reacts by gripping his weapon and badly injuring a person in the crowd, the high priest's servant. From among all those who had gathered, the servant is probably the least involved. He didn't make the decision to kill Jesus. He was just carrying out an order. And he, of all people, now had to suffer by losing his right ear. And then something surprising happened, Jesus reached out His hand and healed the servant. Now you might expect that in their amazement, everyone laid down their weapons and left Jesus in peace. But no, that didn't happen either. The miracle was surprisingly not commented upon or noticed. The soldiers, including the servant whose ear Jesus had just healed, continue what they were doing. They pick up their weapons and arrest Jesus. Can it be that the people at that time were so used to Jesus' miracles that they were no longer surprised by them? Completely out of habit, they had forgotten what it even meant that the Son of God was among them. In any case, they also lost sight of Jesus.

The only one who kept His gaze firmly on God is Jesus Himself. Jesus remained calm and didn't address the soldiers, but their leaders. He addressed their fear directly – "You saw me in the Temple every day. Why didn't you arrest me then? Why now?" It was clear for Jesus that His path of suffering would now begin. He thought about why He had actually come. He thought about the fact that His life's work was about to be completed. It was His goal to lead people back to God. That's why He had to go down this bitter path so that the power of sin, death, and the devil would be broken. He thought about the love His Father has for all people – love which is greater than the power of violence and betrayal.

When we listen to and read the Passion narrative, we should place ourselves in the background and ask ourselves how we might react in such a situation. At the beginning, I referenced the example of a prison guard in war. Psychologists show that people easily succumb to the influence of authorities and other forces and oppress others. It's even more important that we ask ourselves these questions: Under whose authority do I place myself? And who do I allow to influence me? I can't go against great and strong authorities by myself. And most importantly, I can't do anything against the power of Satan. It is more important to direct my gaze firmly onto Jesus. I must therefore clearly ask these questions: Who do I focus on? Who is the most important to me? Who do I give priority to? Do I look at the injustice that has happened to me or others? Do I accept that? Is all this more important than Jesus? Is my fear more important than Jesus? And what happens when I am caught in a situation where all the powers of hell are out to divert my attention away from Jesus? Who do I look to? Where do I get my strength when everything else is against me? And do I have the courage to defy evil? Humans are very short sighted. It is much easier to believe what we can feel, taste, and see today at this very moment. Feelings like hopelessness, fear, hate, or greed are more concrete than faith in Jesus. And in this respect, these can be so strong that they affect our whole life and we can only see such things. Jesus wants to expand our vision, turn it away from all these things that weigh us down and turn it towards God and His promises. Our verse of the week provides a wonderful picture of this: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62) The kingdom of God is always before us. God and His promises are always before us. They also open our eyes to the future. As soon as we lose sight of this future and of our Lord Jesus, we only see the fear, disappointments, and hatred that are all around us. We don't want to let ourselves be influenced by such things. Instead, with my eyes firmly fixed on this future in Jesus, I am filled with Him and His love and I can leave behind everything that weighs me down and holds me back. Amen.