

Sermon AMC- A Place Beyond the Imagination

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Sunday, April 16, 2017

When you look at gods described either in mythologies and religions across the world, you will find gods that have great looks for if they are terrifying, then terrifying to the extreme, you will find gods with all kinds of superpowers, like the power to fly or the power to increase in size or lift whole mountains. You will find gods who claim incredible things like creation of the universe or destroying armies of demons. But you will not find a story of a god who looked ordinary, who was the embodiment of humility, and whose greatest accomplishment was his suffering and sacrifice for the whole human race. In the human imagination, there is no possibility of such a life for God.

Today we celebrate a very big event. The vindication of this God who comes back to life. But to fully appreciate the event and impact of the Resurrection we need to look at the very deliberate choices that Jesus Christ made rose from the dead, there were a few interesting twists and turns on the journey. Last Sunday we looked at how Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly with the whole city cheering him on. Considering that it was Passover time, the city was full of Jews from across the nation. So it was like the whole nation had turned out to see the promised Messiah ride into town and liberate them from many years of Roman occupation. It polling existed then, Jesus would be close to a 90% just about this time. Then as you know, things began to change dramatically. The 10% that did not poll for Jesus Christ also happened to be the powers that be. The ruling elite of the country. They made a deal with Judas Iscariot, a person from Christ's inner circle to betray him. So on Thursday when the guards come to arrest him, Jesus gives in without a fight. It is this arrest and easy capture by the authorities that causes Jesus to lose his approval rating. You can say it went from 90% to 10%.

They begin to imagine that Jesus was another pretend Messiah like many before him. People could only imagine a Messiah as someone who really knew how to fight and also slip out of reach of the occupying soldiers. Jesus did not do what they imagined. Instead he got caught right away. Shocking for everybody around.

Now once he was caught, Jesus Christ was in the hands of many people. The temple authorities, the Jewish vassal King Herod and the Roman Governor and Prefect Pontius Pilot. Finally he was at the mercy of the Roman soldiers. In each of these places, Jesus defies the human imagination by what he does and does not do. Let me explain.

First, the temple authorities. Now the temple authorities were after Jesus a long time. Because they saw that his popularity was increasing quickly, they really wanted to get rid of him quickly. Once someone becomes very high profile, then killing them can lead to riots and they did not want to attract the attention of the Romans in that way. What they never would have guessed is that Jesus was evading their capture, consistently, till the whole nation acknowledged him as the foretold Messiah. Then, when Jesus could have done many things to evade capture, now that he had so many people with him, he does the unthinkable and allows himself to be captured. In fact on the night that he is captured when Peter strikes the Roman guard with his sword, Jesus heals the guard's ear! In fact this miracle is the only miracle that Jesus performs during his entire trial process until his death. Thing about this. The only miracle that Jesus performs during this capture, trial and death on the cross, is the healing on the soldier who had come to arrest him!

Once he is in the hands of the Jewish religious leaders he could have debated with them like he had done numerous times in the past. You see, Jesus was finally before the supreme court. This was the final Jewish authority. But what does he choose to do? He

chooses not to debate any of them and not to answer any of their charges. What Jesus was choosing to do was show them that they, the highest religious authorities in the land did not have authority over him. And it was working because when Jesus was with the temple authorities they expected to either see Jesus an ordinary human been get intimidated by the authorities he was facing or if he was a miracle worker as his reputation said he was they expected to see some miracles. But the temple authorities, see that Jesus is neither intimidated by them nor is he putting on some miraculous sign to prove who he was. That sense of confidence on Jesus' part unsettles the temple bigwigs and they shuttle Jesus back and forth from between Annas and Caiphas. Annas was the high priest from the previous year and the father-in-law of Caiphas, who was the high priest of the current year. When the temple authorities cannot imagine a way to get a straight conviction of Jesus they shuttle him off to the Roman authorities.

Now there too Jesus defies the imagination. You know what happens to Jesus in the Roman hands. You see, the Romans were experienced in the art of intimidation. With their big palaces and imposing uniforms and big armies, they ruled their empire with shock and awe. So when someone is taken before a Roman Governor and Prefect like Pontius Pilot, the whole atmosphere of the place is supposed to make the person weak in the knees. Secondly, the Romans were also known for their cruel and unusual punishments. So people would do anything to get out of the situation. So imagine when Jesus is brought to this Roman Governor, Jesus is neither impressed or intimidated by Pontius Pilot. Jesus neither tries to make excuses nor does he try to pass the blame on to someone else. These are what all human beings do under pressure. Once again Jesus defies the imagination and stands there trying to do nothing to lessen his pain and get out of the situation. Imagine Pontius Pilot's situation. He has never seen anyone like this before and he is just flummoxed. So he does exactly what the temple authorities do. He

tries to wash his hands of Jesus by palming him off to King Herod. So just like when he was in the temple, now Jesus goes back and forth between the Herod and Pilot. And both don't know exactly what to do with Jesus. You see King Herod had heard about Jesus and had heard that he was a prophet who could do miracles. So he was very eager to see Jesus perform some miracles in front of him. Jesus of course refused to do so. But if Jesus was just an ordinary person, he should have been intimidated why Herod's power. He was not intimidated, he was not even afraid and he did nothing to use these powerful people to get out of the situation he was in. So when he was in front of King Herod, he remains absolutely silent. And when he is in front of Pontius Pilot, the most powerful man that Jesus faces, he gives him a lesson on power and a lesson in truth. Imagine that! Imagine what Pontius Pilot would have felt when this man who was condemned to die is teaching Pilot something about Pilots power and authority! And then he challenges him to think about the deeper meaning of truth. Pilot as you know can't take it any longer. At the end of this trial, it is Pontius Pilot who wants to run away and not Jesus. Imagine that my friends!

Finally, Jesus gets thrown to the mercy of the soldiers. Now here too the people around him were thinking and expecting him to do certain specific things. Remember when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday they were shouting Hosanna? Remember Hosanna means, "Save us", right? On Good Friday, the crowds around Jesus were not shouting Save us any more, they were shouting "save yourself!". The people were mocking Jesus. And the soldiers were making fun of him too. That was their entertainment. They did not have too many fun ways to entertain themselves in those days. Neither did the soldiers have too much of job satisfaction. These soldiers would have had a lot of issues and the one place they were free to take out all their aggression was on those people they had to slowly kill. And as Jesus was going through his own slow death, how many times would the thought have crossed his mind to call down angels and stop the execution. But he did not. How many times, he would have wanted

to heal a part of his body that was being torn apart by the whip. You can imagine a part of his body burning in pain and he can heal it in one second but he has to resist the temptation to do any repair on his body or lessen the pain in any way. There is another idea that actually is held by another religion. This religion says that Jesus just could not have died on the cross, but that he somehow substituted himself for someone else on the cross. Remember the time Simon of Cyrene was asked to carry the cross. It was possible for Jesus to simply have switched faces or just tricked the people about to not realize this but that the idea these people believe is that Jesus swapped places with someone else and escaped the scene. Jesus would not have done that because that would have defeated his very purpose of coming to earth. However the human imagination thinks of all kinds of ways that Jesus could have saved himself. Finally, when Jesus is on the cross with two of the thieves, one on his right and one on his left, the unrepentant thief tells Jesus to save himself and then to save them too. The human imagination is thinking that that long as Jesus is hanging there on the cross, he is useless to anybody. The human imagination just cannot fathom what Jesus was doing on the cross, even though he had explained to very well many times to his disciples.

In the end Jesus dies. At this point Jesus is left to the pure forces of nature. In other words his body is left to the biological and chemical and physical processes. Under normal circumstances, what happens to a dead body is well defined. The body after all is made up of 65% water, 20% proteins, 12% fats. That only leaves 3% or other trace elements. It's value is very little. And the moment death happens, the moment, the breath of God that is placed in us is taken away, the physical body rapidly starts moving to its natural state of becoming nothing more than a few pounds of dirt. The normal bacteria that all of us carry in our gut moves out into the rest of the body and begins the process of turning us to dirt. Under normal circumstances by day 3 in a hot climate like

Palestine, this process is well underway. I want to touch upon a principle of physics that is underneath everything that is happening. The second law of thermodynamics states that, in a closed system entropy always increases. That means that in the entire universe, any system always moves from order to chaos. This law is never violated. What is happening in decomposition is that the order that was there in a human body is simply melting away at a rapid rate.

What does Jesus do with the process of biological decomposition and the second law of thermodynamics? He mocks those laws by not only reversing the process that normally would have happened in the three day decomposition process, he does something even more unimaginable. He attains a physical body whose characteristics are far superior to the one that he died with, completely defying the imagination of his own disciples, the hundreds of people he encountered and the best science that we know 2000 years later. If that is not a place beyond the imagination what is?

Now here is the really really big deal to all this for you and me. Romans 8:11 says, if you have that Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead, in you, that same Spirit will give life to your mortal body through His Spirit who dwells in you. In other words that resurrection power that defies the imagination of human beings to this day will operate even in you and me doing amazing things for all eternity. All he says of you is to say yes to Him. May each of us permit our Lord to do in us what we cannot imagine ourselves doing, all that He may be glorified. Let us pray.