

Andrew K. Frey. Midweek Lent 3. John 18:4-11.
March 3, 2021. St. John, Town of Center, WI.

Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who are you looking for?” ⁵“Jesus the Nazarene,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus told them.

Judas, the betrayer, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus told them, “I am he,” they backed away and fell to the ground. ⁷Then Jesus asked them again, “Who are you looking for?” “Jesus the Nazarene,” they said.

⁸“I told you that I am he,” Jesus replied. “So if you are looking for me, let these men go.” ⁹This was to fulfill the statement he had spoken: “I did not lose any of those you have given me.”

¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus. ¹¹So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup my Father has given me?” (EHV)

Theme: Hands of Misguided Zeal—Peter

We all have that friend, that one guy we know who often acts without thinking. He is impulsive, bold, and brash, getting himself into all sorts of trouble. In one moment, he is doing something amazing or making people laugh, but in the next moment he is making a complete fool out of himself. He is fun to hang out with for a while, but eventually his shtick gets old and a bit annoying.

Maybe not to this extreme, but of all the disciples, this is Peter. He did some great things, but also made a fool out of himself—he confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; he preached a great sermon on the day of Pentecost, he even raised a girl from the dead. Twice on Maundy Thursday Peter claimed that he would never fall away from the Lord, but, as Jesus warned him, just a few hours later on three separate occasions he denied even knowing Jesus. Peter once walked on water but then doubted and sank; he reprimanded Jesus for talking about his death prompting Jesus to respond, **Get behind me Satan!** Then there is our text for today; Peter cut off the ear of a man named, Malchus.

When Jesus and his disciples were in the Garden of Gethsemane, he led Peter, James, and John away from the other disciples. Living those three behind—just a stone’s throw away, he prayed, **Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.** Jesus knew what was going to happen to him—all the physical, emotional, and worst of all: the spiritual pain that he was going to endure. And he prayed that the cup of suffering that he would endure be taken from him. But only if it was the Father’s will.

Peter heard that prayer from a distance—at least he should have! Peter and the other disciples fell asleep! Even though Jesus repeatedly told them to stay awake and pray, three times they fell asleep.

After the third time, Jesus told them to get up because Judas was leading a large mob to arrest Jesus. We aren’t exactly sure how many there were. Matthew tells us it was a large crowd with clubs and swords. John uses the term, company, or cohort. A Roman cohort consisted of 600 men, so obviously it wasn’t the entire cohort, but just a portion. Nevertheless, this was a mob of men, both Romans and Jews, who came to arrest Jesus.

It was then that Peter sprang into action. Luke tells us that Peter asked Jesus if they should strike with their swords, but he didn’t wait for an answer. He cut off the right ear of Malchus, the High Priest’s servant. The theme we are working with today is, “Misguided Zeal.” Peter loved the

Lord, and was certainly zealous for him, but his zeal was misguided to say the least. In his effort to protect Jesus, Peter sinned against the Lord by causing someone physical harm!

But a bigger problem lay behind Peter's misguided zeal—it was a mistrust in the Lord, and a failure to believe in him as the one being in control. Peter should have realized this by now—Jesus talked about his arrest and death again and again. Peter should have heard Jesus' prayer. He should have remembered the proof of Jesus' divinity that he received by being an eyewitness to his miracles and on the Mount of Transfiguration. But Peter forgot all about that; thinking that he had to defend Jesus, in one act of unlove and hate he caused physical harm to another, while probably trying to kill him.

At times, like Peter, we too may have misguided zeal. Like Peter, we love the Lord, and we become upset when the Lord's is mocked or we see others wickedly disregarding his word. But far too often we become overzealous and try to take matters into our own hands and sin against the Lord's command to love others. Like those who bomb abortion clinics, or picket outside certain events condemning everyone involved. Or when we viciously attack someone who is caught in a sin while forgetting about the gospel; or when we strive to make someone pay for sinning against us. Again, we are right to be upset but there is a right way to go about it; and we must remember what Paul writes in Romans 12, **Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay,"**

Not only is a misguided zeal our problem, but so is Peter's sin—not trusting in God. Yes, we want to defend the Lord and protect his name, and yet we often forget about his power to bring to repentance through the law and gospel, and the effectiveness of his pure word and sacraments.

Jesus didn't need Peter's help. As God, he didn't need any help from anyone! When the mob came to arrest Jesus he asked them who they were looking for and when they said Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus responded by saying, **I am he**. This is a reference to Exodus 3, when God called Moses out of the burning bush and gave his name to Moses as, **I Am**. By saying, **I am he**, Jesus is referring to himself as the Lord, the God who called Moses out of the burning bush.

When the mob heard Jesus say this, they were knocked backwards and then to the ground. That was the weight, but sheer power of these words by Jesus. The mob wasn't in control, Jesus was. With just his words he showed that he was in complete control.

That happened before Peter cut off Malchus' ear. And Jesus did something else to prove that he was in control. Peter may have used his hands for evil, but Jesus reached out his hand and touched Malchus' head and healed him—his ear instantly was restored. This last miracle Jesus performed before his resurrection saved Peter from prison, if not death, and he spared Malchus extreme pain.

Jesus once again displayed his power and might. These miracles proved that he is God for he can do only that which God can do. And if he has power to heal ears that have been cut off, then he has enough power to get away from this angry mob, whom he had already knocked to the ground with just his words!

Jesus didn't need Peter's help—he could have taken care of things himself. And if he didn't want to, he could have had the angels help him out. Matthew writes in his account that Jesus said to Peter, **Do you not realize that I could call on my Father, and at once he would provide me with more than twelve legions of angels?**

Peter, acting without thinking, was really no match for the large mob that came to arrest Jesus. He really wouldn't have been able to do anything to protect Jesus. But thousands of angels—that would have done the trick. All Jesus needed to do was say the word.

But he didn't. He didn't call upon the Father for help. He also didn't use his divine power and might to get out of it—he showed his divine power to prove to us that he could have gotten out

of it. And the people at his crucifixion mocked and ridiculed him, **If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!** Jesus, of course, is the Son of God, and he could have come down from the cross at any time, but he didn't.

Why? Why didn't he come down from the cross, use his own power to stop his arrest, or call upon the angels to come to his defense? Because it wasn't the Father's will. As he said to Peter, **Shall I not drink the cup my Father has given me?** The cup that Jesus had prayed about just moments before—well, it was the Father's will for Jesus to suffer this way. It was the Father's will for Jesus to be betrayed, arrested, beaten, mocked, flogged, and crucified. It was the Father's will for Jesus to suffer through our eternal damnation when he was forsaken by his own Father in our place. This was the Father's will so that Jesus would pay for our sins, cover over our offenses—including those of misguided zeal and unbelief, and make us pure and holy in his sight. It was the Father's will that Jesus humble himself to the point of death so that we'd be exalted with him forever in heaven.

And so Jesus refused to make use of his power and might. We call this Jesus' "passive obedience;" he obeyed the Father's will by not doing what he could have done so that he could save us. And so Jesus humbled himself, not making full use of his divine power, to the point of death simply to save us from our sins!

Peter often acted impulsively, which often got him in trouble, like when he cut off Malchus' ear. But not Jesus. He knew exactly what he could have done, and he made a deliberate conscience decision not to stop those who came to arrest him. He willingly let it all happen to him so that he could go to the cross and save us from our sins so that we'd join him in everlasting glory. Amen.