

**SERMON**  
**PLACES OF THE PASSION – GESETHEMANE**  
**MATTHEW 26:44-56**  
**SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2021**

When sailors describe a storm that no one can escape, they often call it a perfect storm. Not perfect in the sense of ideal, but perfect in the sense of its combining factors. Combining factors like hurricane-force winds and a cold front and rain and a high tide. The hurricane-force winds alone would be impossible. But hurricane-force winds and a cold front and rain and a high tide? A perfect storm!

We don't need to be sailors to experience a perfect storm. All we need is a layoff and a recession and a child going away to college; a disease and a divorce and a parent with dementia; a relationship breakup and a college rejection letter and a C- in calculus. We can usually handle one challenge, but two or three or four at a time? All of us have just spent the last year in a perfect storm; and it still continues!

We're in a series called Places of the Passion. Today we walk with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane is the place of a perfect storm! Betrayal and an arrest and an assault and desertion—all leading to death by crucifixion.

It all starts, as Matthew 26:48 describes, with a great crowd gathering with swords and clubs. Within that crowd are chief priests and the elders of the people. While the chief priests controlled the temple, the elders were the rulers of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish senate of seventy.

Reed Lessing of Creative Communications for the Parish says of the chief priests and elders: *"It was like having the Supreme Court and Congress of the United States sending the FBI to arrest you!"* Matthew identifies the one leading this crowd as the Betrayer; (a.k.a., Judas).

The chaos commences.

Matthew says one of the disciples stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear." John's Gospel tells us it

was Peter who drew his sword; that the servant's name was Malchus.

Like Peter and the disciples do you ever feel that you are adrift in the perfect storm? Are you, like them, doing everything you can to survive? Have you battened-down the hatches? Lowered the anchor? Consulted the bank? Changed your diet? Called an attorney? Tightened your budget? Gone into counseling or rehab or therapy?

Yet the sea still is churning?

And the waves are still coming?

Then I've got some really good news for you. Easter is coming! Christ has this all under control. Even though right now in Gethsemane it may appear as though Judas and the chief priests and the Sanhedrin are running things; Christ is really the one in control!

How do I know this?

Matthew 26:52-53.

In these verses Jesus tells his disciples; "Put your sword back where it belongs. All who use swords are destroyed by swords. Don't you realize that I am able right now to call to my Father, and twelve companies—more, if I want them—of fighting angels would be here, battle-ready? But if I did that, how would the Scriptures come true that say this is the way it has to be?"

Who is in control could not be any clearer! When his enemies come, Christ goes out to meet them. When Judas approaches, Christ doesn't run. When Peter strikes Malchus, Christ commands Peter to put his sword away. Jesus says in John 10:18, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord." Though the powers of darkness rise against him Christ is in control. Jesus even says that if he wanted to, he could call on his twelve legions of angels. What's that mean? There were 6,000 men in one Roman legion. Do the math—12 x 6,000 is 72,000 angels! Christ doesn't need 72,000 angels because he is in absolute control!

I am reminded of the story that is told of Carol, a high school senior on the girls' basketball team, who minutes before the start of her last game of her high school career was informed by her coach that her father had just died. Instead of reacting sorrowfully to the news, Carol just took it all in stride and said, "I'll leave right after the game."

The coach had heard Carol speak highly of her father and expected her to be upset and begin sobbing out of control. When she didn't, the coach said, "Carol, you don't have to play. The game isn't that important." Carol ignored the coach and played the game anyway. And play she did; she was the star, scoring the most points in her whole career.

In the locker room after the game, while some of her fellow players offered her condolences, most were appalled by her lack of sorrow. The coach was mad and thought she had taught too much devotion to sports and not enough compassion. She scolded Carol, "Why did you play the game? Your father is dead. I'm ashamed of you and of myself for not showing him due respect."

Carol replied, "Coach, this was our last game. I am a senior. I had to play. This was the first time my dad has ever seen me play and I had to play like I have never played before."

"But your father's dead," the coach replied.

Carol choked back the tears and smiled at the coach. "I guess you didn't know? My father was blind. And now that he is with Jesus, he can see."

Carol was calm because she allowed her faith, not her fear, to guide her. Likewise, in our scripture passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus allowed his faith to guide him. Reed Lessing says that Jesus remained calm throughout the crisis at Gethsemane because *"he trusted the scriptures."*

In a Peanuts comic strip, Lucy is struggling with her Sunday School memory verse. Finally, she says, "Maybe it's a verse from the book of Reevaluations."

She's right you know; the scriptures are a book of reevaluations. They help us reevaluate who is really in control:

- When it comes to our sins and the forgiveness of those sins - Christ is in control.
- When it comes to answering our prayers according to God's loving plan Christ is in control.
- And even when it comes to the heavy burdens, we carry Christ is in control and takes them all the way to the cross!

So, if Christ is in absolute control what is your plan when the next perfect storm hits?

- Never board a plane without a parachute?
- Never leave the house without a facemask?
- Never step on a crack lest you break your mother's back?

Joanna Adams in her book Faith and Fear says, *"Faith is not the absence of fear, but the courage to walk through the fear; to take the hand that is offered. To be courageous is not to be fearless; it is to be able to act in spite of fear. Fear is morally neutral. It has nothing to do with your character. It just shows up in response to a real or imagined danger. We cannot control whether we are going to be visited by fear, but we can decide whether or not we are going to let fear in and let it live in our hearts and control what we do."*

Do you recall what Mark 4:41 said of Christ?

"Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

When the next storm rages, and believe me, there will be a next storm; I pray that you and I can trust Christ and instead of allowing our fears to take the helm; allow our faith to let Christ take control.