

MASTER OF EVERY SITUATION

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A little boy was looking at the pictures in his large family Bible. He paused at the one of Jesus on the cross. "The Crucifixion hurt his feelings very much; the cruel nails, the unfeeling spear; he looked at the picture a long time and then turned the page saying, 'If God had been there, he would not have let them do it.'"ⁱ

What do you think? Do you feel sorry for Jesus? If you were God, would you have stopped them? Would you have rooted for Jesus, the underdog? Would you have called to him telling him to pop the nails, to confound his enemies, to confound our enemies? Do you sympathize with those who cried, "Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, so that we might see and believe."ⁱⁱ

What image do you have of Jesus? I remember an old childhood hymn,

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,

Look upon a little child;

Is that your image of Jesus, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"?

Or as another hymn puts it,

Christian children all must be

Mild, obedient, good as He.

Is that your Jesus? Mild? Obedient? Good? But weak, limp-wristed, milquetoast, a pushover?

If that is Jesus then why the Cross? Why the opposition? Why were his enemies so adamant that he must die?

The Passion story according to John, which we heard this morning, paints a very different picture, a picture of Jesus as Master of Every Situation.

Jesus is Master of Gethsemane. In John's version, there is no agony scene, no crying or beating of the breast, not there nor on the cross. Instead, John says, Jesus knew "everything that was going to happen to him."ⁱⁱⁱ The soldiers who came to arrest him fell to the ground at the mention of his name.^{iv} Earlier on in the gospel, six times the soldiers had not been able to arrest Jesus,^v but now it is Jesus who tells them to arrest him and to let the disciples go.^{vi} When Peter tries to protect Jesus with the sword, Jesus tells him to put the sword away. "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?" Of course, he will. His hour had come and everyone – Judas, Peter, the soldiers – everyone took their directions from Jesus. He is Master of Gethsemane.

He is also Master of His Trial. Earlier on, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, had advised that one man should die for the people,^{vii} but unknowingly he was declaring exactly what God had in mind. Now his hour had come. In his dialogue with Annas, Caiaphas and Pilate, Jesus the prisoner is clearly in charge. Pilate the governor shuttles back and forth indecisively like a frightened lieutenant. The Judeans, who represent the epitome of 'the world', have death in their hearts, yet refuse to enter a Gentile building lest they be defiled.^{viii} Jesus gives them all the evidence they need. His hour has come. For this he was born. Jesus is Master of His Trial.

And Jesus is Master of the Cross. Here he is still in control. He carries his own cross. There is no Simon of Cyrene to carry it for him. All that he does and says are meant to fulfill Scripture.^{ix} He speaks three times. The first time he commits his mother to the care of his beloved disciple.^x Then he says, "I thirst," in order, John says, to fulfill Scripture.^{xi} Finally, he is Master of His Death. He has not been on the cross long enough yet to die, but his hour has come.^{xii} It is finished. It is accomplished. It is consummated, Jesus says. He bows his head and gives up his spirit.^{xiii}

This is no "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." This is Jesus, the Master of Every Situation. This is Jesus the Good Shepherd who dies for his sheep caring until the very end.^{xiv} This is Jesus the

Sovereign enthroned by those who mocked him, those who unwittingly called him the King of the Jews. Even the wrath of humankind is used by God. Jesus is Master of Every Situation.

Does all this as John relates it mean that there was no suffering? No, but through the eyes of faith the sufferings of Jesus are transformed from a seeming defeat into a glorious exaltation. Jesus is lifted up on the cross in order that all might be drawn to him.^{xv} The Master of Every Situation is revealed and enthroned as King, and people are drawn to him.

Monarchies are rare these days, at least those that have real power. Nonetheless, there is something about Monarchs, Sovereigns, Royalty, Kings and Queens that attracts people. This speaks to a deep longing within us which no earthly Sovereign could ever fulfil. We may thrill to the splendour of a Monarch who rules from a majestic palace, but our heart yearns for another leader, one who is close to us, who shares our life and who calls forth from us, not awe, but love.

Thornton Wilder wrote a short drama based on the gospel story in John's Gospel that occurs around the pool of Bethesda.^{xvi} Sick people stand around the pool waiting for the water to move. It was said that the first to jump in when the water moves would be healed. One of them, a doctor, has a wound that will not heal. An angel approaches him and says, "Draw back, physician, healing is not for thee. Without your wound, where would your power be?"

Just as he turns away disappointed that he cannot be healed, a man runs up to him. "Come home with me," he says. "My son is lost in dark thoughts, no one understands him, and only you have ever lifted his mood...He will not listen to us. Only you, who are wounded, can help him."^{xvii} Only the One who was wounded can help.

If God had been there, would God have stopped it? No, God was there and "it was the will of God to bruise him."^{xviii} Do I feel sorry for Jesus? No, Jesus was Master of the Situation. I am thankful because Jesus did not come down from the cross but was the Master of the Situation, so that he can be Master of

Every Situation. Master of my Situation and yours. This is our faith. So may it be for you and me. So may it be. Amen.

ⁱ Richard Jefferies, *Bevis: The Story of a Boy*, quoted in J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, Cambridge University Press, 1941, p. 98.

ⁱⁱ Mark 15: 32; Matthew 27: 42. cf. Luke 23: 35.

ⁱⁱⁱ John 18: 4.

^{iv} John 18: 6.

^v John 7: 30, 44; 8: 20, 59; 10: 39; 12: 36.

^{vi} John 18: 8.

^{vii} John 11: 50.

^{viii} Fred B. Craddock *et al.*, *Preaching the New Common Lectionary, Year B, Lent, Holy Week, Easter*, Abingdon, 1984, p. 127.

^{ix} John 19: 24, 28.

^x John 19: 26, 27.

^{xi} John 19: 28.

^{xii} John 19: 31-33.

^{xiii} John 19: 30.

^{xiv} John 10: 11-18.

^{xv} John 12: 32.

^{xvi} John 5: 2-18.

^{xvii} Quoted by Walter Welch, *The Zig Zag of Life*, CANEC, 1980, p. 85.

^{xviii} Isaiah 53: 10.