



March 20, 2016

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The Gift of Misfits
Luke 22:39-62
Palm Sunday, March 20, 2016

So far in this series called Gifts of the Darkwood, we have talked about the gift of uncertainty, the gift of emptiness, the gift of being thunderstruck, the gift of getting lost, the gift of temptation. And today, the gift of misfits.

I looked up the definition of misfit. It can mean something that fits badly, such as a garment that is too large or too small. It can also mean “a person who is not suited or is unable to adjust to the circumstances of his or her particular situation.”

This particular Sunday is a misfit – it doesn’t know exactly what it wants to be. It has a hard time adjusting to the situation, and as a result, this Sunday has two names to cover all the bases.

One name is the one we all know: Palm Sunday. It is the most popular name given to this Sunday. It is a day of great joy as we tell the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem, and the people of the city are so excited that they come and greet Jesus with shouts of Hosanna and waving of Palm branches.

We started out that way today as we waved the Palms with joy and sang the typical Palm Sunday hymns.

But this Sunday has another name that is not quite so popular. The name is Passion Sunday. It says this is not a time of joy because in 5 days Jesus will be arrested, tortured and killed. Passion Sunday says we need to focus on that, and therefore, the service is more somber and reflective as it looks ahead.

By the way, a little side note, tonight there is show on TV called “The Passion.” It is a live musical at 7 p.m. There is a trend of TV of producing live musicals. In the last several

years, we have seen “Sound of Music,” “Peter Pan,” “The Wiz,” and several months ago, “Grease.” The one tonight will concentrate on the last few hours of Jesus’ life, and is set in a modern day context. It should be interesting.

Back to Palm Sunday. Or, is it Passion Sunday? Which one should this day be? Should it be a joyous service? Or, should it be a more reflective service? How about both? Isn’t life usually both at the same time?

Today, we are doing both. We started with the Palms and the joy. We are now turning the corner, and with this sermon, heading towards the Passion. It is a day of joy and it is a day of sadness, and thus it is a day of being a misfit.

But here is the thing: there is a gift in being a misfit.

Our scripture passage today is not the normal Palm Sunday reading of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey. It is a Passion reading. Turn with me to the reading in your bulletin, the sermon note page. You will notice it is long. (I guess I am making up for the last time I preached when I had only one verse!) You will soon see why all these verses are essential.

The passage takes place on the night of Jesus’ arrest, right after the last meal Jesus has with his disciples. We are going to read about a band of misfits – the disciples. As I read the passage, look for the ways the disciples are having a hard time adjusting to their circumstances and situation. In other words, look for ways they are being misfits.

Prayer: In these familiar words, O God, speak to us once again of the mystery of your grace and joy. Transform us through your words. Amen.

Read Luke 22:39-62

In what ways are the disciples having a hard time adjusting to their situation?

They fell asleep when Jesus asked them to stay awake while he was praying.

One of his own betrayed him.

One of disciples tried to fight back when Jesus was arrested.

One of disciples denied ever knowing Jesus. Not once, but three times.

And later, all would flee except for John.

It was not a good night for Jesus' disciples, this band of misfits.

Jesus had said to them "Follow Me" and on that night they fled. Jesus had said "stay here and watch," and on that night, they fell asleep. Jesus had said love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, and on that night one of them uses a sword. Jesus had said my kingdom is not of this world, and on that night one of them tries to force Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom with betrayal.

In the midst of all this betrayal, desertion, violence and denial, there is a gift being offered to these misfits. The gift is in Jesus' response to his misfit disciples. Jesus knew his disciples would betray him...in more ways than one. Yet, he displayed extraordinary grace towards them.

Look at the last supper. Knowing of the betrayal, he still washed their feet. Knowing they would fall asleep, he still shared bread and wine with them. Knowing they would deny him and flee, he still said to them that night: I call you friends. Even Judas was included.

I am leading a class called *24 Hours* by Adam Hamilton. We are looking at the last 24 hours of Jesus' life. We learned about the dinner seating arrangement in those days, and it explained the seating arrangement at Jesus' last meal with his disciples.

The table was low to the ground, low enough that the people reclined at the table. The left shoulder faced the table; the feet faced away. The tables were placed in a U shape called a triclinium (demonstrate). The open section made it easy for the servants to serve them.

The head of the table was the side table; this is where the guest of honor sat. The places to the left and right of the guest of honor were reserved for those closest to the honored guest.

So, who was sitting in those honored positions next to Jesus at that last meal?

John was probably to the right of Jesus. There are times during the meal that John leans on Jesus' breast to speak with him, so we know he sat to the right of Jesus. Who sat on Jesus' left? When Jesus said one of them would betray him, he said it is the one that dips in the same bowl as he. He is sharing a bowl with the person on his left. Judas. Judas was sitting in a place of honor next to Jesus.

The gift of being a misfit is that the disciples were still shown grace and mercy and forgiveness in spite of their behavior that night. The gift of being a misfit is that even the one who betrayed Jesus still had a place of honor next to Jesus.

I hate to say this but we are all misfits. Sometimes we have a hard time living up to being followers and disciples of Christ.

Have you fallen asleep when Jesus asks you to do something?

Have you heard people talk against Jesus and you do not stand up for him? In fact, no one even knows you are a follower of Christ?

Have you expressed your love for Jesus on Sunday, then on Monday act as if you never knew him?

We all do these things in some form or another.

But here is the gift of being a misfit: if Jesus showed forgiveness and grace and mercy to the disciples, his band of misfits, Jesus will certainly do it for you and me. We should be grateful that these embarrassing stories of the disciples' behavior are here because it says that if they can be forgiven, so can we.

We are all, at times, misfits of Jesus. But the gift of being a misfit is we are shown grace and mercy and forgiveness. And I can add: restoration.

The 4 Gospels tell the story of the last supper and the arrest of Jesus from different viewpoints because the audiences of the Gospels were different. Some leave certain elements of the story out; others include something new and different. But Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial are in all 4 Gospels.

Let's look at Peter first. We all know the story. It is probably the most famous story of the night. How do you think people know this story? The only one who witnessed it (besides those who recognized Peter) was Jesus. The other disciples were gone. No one needed to know.

So, how do we know it? From Peter! He must have told that story over and over again as he introduced people to Christ: I denied Jesus not once, but three times. But after his resurrection, Jesus came to me, took me back and restored me. I am forgiven because of his grace extended me. And if it has been extended to me, it will be extended to you.

That was his story. Do you have a story of God's grace and mercy and forgiveness extended to you? Share it with others, so they will know of God's grace and mercy and forgiveness for them.

Let's look at Judas for a moment. One of the questions covered in the *24 Hour* class is what would have happened if Judas had not committed suicide? What if he had just waited 3 days? He would have seen Jesus risen from the dead. Jesus had come to Peter and restored him. Would Jesus have done the same thing for Judas? Could his betrayal be forgiven?

Adam Hamilton says this: "There is no doubt he would have forgiven Judas. Now imagine the witness Judas would have had if he had just waited three day. You can almost hear him preaching: I so loved the things of this world and so believed in the spirit of the revolution against Rome that I actually sold Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver. But I'm here to tell you today that the grave could not hold him down. And after his resurrection he forgave even me. If he could forgive me for the terrible thing I did, don't you know that his grace is sufficient for you?"

Judas could have been one of the most powerful witnesses for Christ had he only waited 3 days."

The third day always comes. We know that because of the resurrection. Hope always breaks through the darkness.

O misfits, no matter where you have been, what you have done, what you have said, Christ forgives you and gives you a new future with hope. As a community of misfits, we have received grace and mercy, and therefore as a church, we are called to extend that grace and mercy to each other here in this community and outside these walls. What we have received to the full, we give out in abundance to all we meet.

Extend that gift of grace and mercy to the person who has betrayed you. Extend that gift of love and forgiveness to the person who has stabbed you in the back. Extend that gift of faithfulness to the one who denies a relationship with you. Give out what has so

richly been given to you.

So, forgiven misfits, I invite you to walk with us this week. Come to The Source on Wednesday as we sing the old hymns of the cross. Come to the Maundy Thursday service at 7 p.m. as we remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples and his arrest. Find yourself in the story.

I invite you to Good Friday at noon as we remember the crucifixion of Jesus, and as we hear Jesus say from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." He is not just speaking to those who crucified him, he is speaking to us.

Then, I invite you back on Easter as we celebrate the Resurrection because death does not have the last word, and our mistakes and regrets no longer define us.

So lay down those burdens of regret that you have carried for so long. Let go of the haunting guilt. Accept the gift of being a misfit: the grace and mercy and forgiveness and love of Christ for you. Amen and amen.

Now, O Community of Misfits, in thankfulness, let us stand and say together what we believe as followers of Jesus Christ....The Apostle's Creed.

Charge and Benediction at the end of the service:

Rumors had spread that a certain Catholic woman was having visions of Jesus. The archbishop decided to check her out.

'Is it true, m'am, that you have visions of Jesus?' asked the cleric.

'Yes,' the woman replied.

'Well, the next time you have a vision, I want you to ask Jesus to tell you the sins that I confessed in my last confession. Please call me if anything happens.'

Ten days later the woman notified her spiritual leader of a recent apparition. Within the hour the archbishop arrived. 'What did Jesus say?' he asked.

She took his hand and gazed deep into his eyes. 'Bishop,' she said, 'these are his exact words: "I CAN'T REMEMBER."

Now, may the Lord bless you and keep. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.