

Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

"The Fearful Future"
Rev. Charles Schuster
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To be honest with you, I've never really been a fan of Focus on the Family. It has seemed a bit myopic, a distortion rather than a focus, driven by politics more than faith. I have never quoted James Dobson in a sermon or a class or even in a private conversation with anyone. But there's one thing he said that I think is exactly right, and with it he gives us an image that is completely proper. He said he thinks that what it means to be a parent today, and I would add, what it means to be alive in this crazy world today, reminds him of a photograph he has in his files of an elegantly dressed woman holding a cup of coffee, her little finger cocked daintily, her face shows absolute self-assurance, she is completely assured and confident, but she does not know what the photograph reveals, that her slip has collapsed around her feet. And the caption reads, "The message reveals confidence is what you have before you understand the situation."

If there is in us a lack of confidence about the future, it may be because we do understand the situation. The future is fearful, because we know what it could be. How do we face the future? Honestly? Realistically? Knowing or understanding somewhat the situation? We are in Lent, moving toward Holy Week, progressing from here to there. We know about the future of Jesus. Somewhat, we know about our future, and it is fearful. But we think of Jesus. Albert Einstein said, "I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life."

In view of Jesus' future as he knew it, I wonder what it must be like to play Jesus in a movie. How would it feel to walk in his footsteps, to speak his words, to stand on the Mount and deliver a message? What would it seem like to ride the donkey into Jerusalem and to hear the crowd cheer, to know the arrest, to stand at the trial, to hear the death

sentence, to carry the cross, to feel the beatings, to face death, to know the future? What is it like to play Jesus in a movie? We could ask James Patrick Caviezel. He played Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ* movie. And he would tell you, it is to suffer. It is to suffer. If you saw that movie, it is full of suffering. When the movie was made, he dislocated his shoulder carrying the cross, and when they were filming the scene of the crucifixion and they had him stripped, and all of his dignity was gone, and they had the crown of thorns on his head, the sky actually grew dark and the rains came. And when they filmed that scene, the cross was hit by lightning. To live is to suffer, and there's fear of the future. To play Jesus, it is the same.

Leonard Sweet once wrote, "What does it mean to build a life on the pedestrian words "Follow me," when walking is a state of permanent disequilibrium? That's how Jesus called his disciples, you know, "Follow me." That's what his disciples were called into, permanent disequilibrium, a state of imbalance. The followers of Jesus are realistic about life. We know to live is to be unsure. To be alive is to be apprehensive.

Two weeks ago I had eye surgery. My eyelids droop. I bump into things, and I'm tired of it. When the surgeon shows up, it's about three o'clock in the afternoon. I know he's been doing surgery all day, and I said to him, "I have a question. Are you well-rested? And he came in front of me and he looked at me and said, "Yes, I am. I did notice the last hour," and he's holding the knife, "my hand began to shake." In the middle of the surgery, he sat me up. We worked with the..... you don't want to know.... and I said, "I have a question. Where did you learn this surgical technique that you're practicing on me?" He came around in front of me and he said, "I read it in a magazine." Wow.

Permanent disequilibrium, not sure about the future. We don't always win, sometime we lose. We don't always succeed, sometimes we fail. We aren't always sure. Sometimes we doubt. And Jesus wanted his friends to stay with him, and they fell asleep, and he said "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," and he said, "Let this cup pass." To live is to suffer. But to live in faith is to know we can carry it. We can stand it. We can bear it. See, the Christian faith is compelling because it lets us know the future may be fearful, but we're not afraid of it, because we know we can live through it.

Steve Goodiear pointed out, he said, "You know there are three ways to get to the top of a tree. One way is to climb it, another way is to sit on an acorn, and the third way is to make friends with a very large bird." Steve adds, "I suspect only one of those options is worthy of considering." I have seen it in your faces. You lose your job, but not your will, and you know you can survive. You hear a diagnosis that you wish had not been spoken, and you tell the doctor, "Let's get on with it, get it going, let's get it fixed." You stand at the grave and tears come down your face like rain on a May afternoon, but there's a look that says, "I will carry on. My love is gone, but it outlives death's grip."

What must it be to play Jesus in a movie? James Patrick Caviezel will tell you it hurts, it hurts terrible. But you find the courage to face it. You survive it. It was in the 1980s when they made a movie of Nikos Kazantzakis's book, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Willem Dafoe was Jesus in that movie. Willem had other parts, for example he played

Spiderman once. He was a voice-over in a James Bond movie. He was a police officer in the television series "NYPD Blue." His role was searching out and finding a serial killer. *The Last Temptation of Christ* was controversial when it came out. There were people protesting. You may remember that. Protesters objected to the idea of a human Jesus. The Catholic church condemned it. Kazantzakis was condemned when he wrote the book, by the church, and the movie. The idea that Jesus thought for a time to escape the cross, the idea that Jesus was in love with Mary Magdalene, the idea that he loved live... *The Last Temptation of Christ* was the temptation to escape, which he thought about in the movie, in the book. "Let this cup pass."

What if it had? What if there had been no death on the cross? Jesus imagined it. Jesus discovered the last temptation, then he discovered it was an illusion. He had been tempted to escape the cross, but he had fulfilled his mission. His life was finished, his journey complete. He did what he came to do, and in the end, death on the cross. Death on the cross. He survived. He died, but he survived. It's like the child who was asked to bring her birth certificate to school one day, and her mother warned her, "This is a very important document, don't lose it." I don't know what happened, maybe it fell out of her pocket or backpack, but she got to school and realized she didn't have it. She was in tears. A teacher came up, not her teacher, but one of the teachers at the school. "What's wrong, honey?" She said, "Oh, I lost my excuse for being born."

I wonder if President Obama ever feels this way? I hope no one ever does. Because you see Nietzsche is right about one thing when he says, "We who have a "why" to live for can endure any "how." " If we have our excuse for being born. The question in life is never, "Did you suffer?" but "How did you find meaning in your suffering?" To suffer or not to suffer, to experience pain or to avoid pain, that's not the option. But to find meaning in our suffering is what we can do. Find meaning. We thrive.

Jesus was a hero, Willem Dafoe discovered, not because he suffered on the cross, but because, in the end, he knew why. It was his mission. That Chinese proverb that says, "A bird does not sing because it has an answer, a bird sings because it has a song." In every life it's going to happen, or maybe it has already. There will be a Jerusalem in our lives. There will be a Holy Week in our life before it's over, and we can know what will happen. In our life there are crises, moments when we take personal responsibility or we lapse into indifference or indecision, and that is the time when we discover what we're made of. More importantly, what we're made for. We can survive a fearful future, if and when it comes, if we see that we have purpose in our pain. If they cannot cure our disease, maybe they can learn something from us so the next person who gets it can be cured. If we cannot fulfill our dream in life, maybe we can help someone else move toward theirs.

Tom Hopkins said, "The number of times I succeed is in direct proportion to the number of times I can fail and keep on trying." And Winston Churchill was right when he said, "Success is going from one failure to another without a loss of enthusiasm." We must not lose our reason for being born. We have a "why" to live for, and we live heroic lives. Like Jesus, the last temptation, we need not escape the future. Jesus... Einstein was

Jewish. He said, "No myth is filled with such life." His life shows us how to face our future and how to thrive in spite of us, as we find meaning in it, and his life shows us how to conquer it. Sometimes we are apt to think only of ourselves. For example, I have one weakness, one major weakness. It's lemon meringue pie. My grandmother made the best. I have never tasted any lemon meringue pie like that in any church I've ever been appointed to, and I have challenged the bakers in every congregation. No-one has come close, until now, until here. Ramona Miller makes the best lemon meringue pie. It's better than my grandmother ever made, and this past Tuesday she came to staff meeting and she whispered loudly in my ear, "I have one for you." Anything else, what is mine, I share. Staff members heard her, they thought about her pie, it is legendary, anticipated I would share it. Maybe it would be for lunch that day. I could see it in their eyes, anticipation. Expectation. When they all got back to their offices, I slipped down into the kitchen, I walked out this back hallway, I came through the Sanctuary here. I didn't pause to pray. I didn't think about Jesus. I didn't connect to God. I walked on past the Preschool, they were out in their play yard. I kind of hid it. I put it in my car. I drove home knowing no one would be there. I sat it down on a table. I got out a fork, and I ate half of it. And I've been repenting ever since.

We will not conquer the future if we act that way. But we will conquer the future if we begin to think of God and other people. Just ask John Powell. John Powell played Jesus. It was Franco Zeffirelli's movie *Jesus of Nazareth*. Unlike *The Passion of the Christ*, where there was suffering and death, unlike *The Last Temptation of Christ*, where there was suffering in meaning, in the movie *Jesus of Nazareth* there is suffering, there is Jesus, and there is God, and there is an attitude you develop with that vision. It's an attitude that says, the problems are big, but God is bigger. The future is frightening, but God is love, and that is perfect, and perfect love casts our fear, and it's not just words, it's words that become flesh, and dwell among us. Everything changes, nothing is the same. When we think of Jesus, we think of God. John Powell was asked what it was like to be Jesus in the movie. He said, "I wish they hadn't asked me. But once they asked me, I knew it was something I could not turn down. A human being cannot play God," he said. "It's the hardest role I ever had. I'd arrive at the set. I'd be annoyed, irritable, fed up. Normally, I could use those emotions. But when you play Jesus, you know, you can't."

When we act like Jesus, we see God. With Jesus, it is, "Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone." It is, "Forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." It is, "If you live by the sword, you're going to die by the sword." It is, "It's better to give than to receive." That's the thing about playing Jesus in a movie. John Powell says he's not a believer. I don't believe that, when he says that. He's married to Barbara Lord. Don't you find that ironic? But when he talks about Jesus, he sounds a little like Einstein, who says that he is enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. To play Jesus in a movie is to see the world in a different way. It's to view creation from the vantage point of the Creator. It's to see the bad news as prelude to the good news, and that's the Gospel, that's the truth. It's to see the future as filled with unimaginable potential, and to those who think they've seen it all, they ain't seen nothin'. And "me and mine" turns out to be "thee and thine" for Christians and for people of faith. We have the confidence even if we understand the situation, because we know there is a God who turns rainstorms into

rainbows, who turns crosses into empty tombs, who turns broken hearts into hearts on fire for good. Jesus of Nazareth. We can conquer the future.

What must it be like to play Jesus in a movie? P.T. Forsythe said, "The act of breakage is the point of communion." We don't have to wonder what it's like to play Jesus in a movie, because when we come to the table here at the church, we take the bread and we take the cup. We become the body of Christ. And as for the fearful future, we can face it. And we will thrive because of the meaning we find in it, and we will conquer it because the world does not belong to the forces of suffering and death. The world belongs to God. It's the word. It became flesh in Jesus, but it becomes flesh in us. Let us pray.

O God, since we are the body of Christ, help us to learn our script, and give us the courage to play our part like he did. Amen.