



SERMONS THAT WORK

Tuesday in Holy Week

The Hero Revealed

[RCL]: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

Sometimes our eyes deceive us. We think we know what we're looking at, but it turns out that reality is different than we thought, like our perceptions or expectations were off, there is more here than meets the eye. Sometimes, of course, we can't see something because it's hidden. Sometimes it's hidden in plain sight, and other times, it was waiting for the right time to be revealed.

Moviemakers know that the *hidden hero* can be a great character, a great type. You know, the person who turns out to be very different from our first expectations just when the plot demands it. Think of the bookworm whose quiet, nerdy nature could make her easily overlooked, but then it totally pays off when she knows the obscure fact that saves the day. Think of Hermione Granger (from the Harry Potter series) who is the brains of the bunch. You can tease her for being a know-it-all, but you want her recall of spells when fighting the bad guys. Think of Dr. Henry Walton Jones, Jr., who, if you only knew him from archaeology class, you would think of as a harmless bespectacled professor, but we know him as Indiana Jones, whose vision somehow improves when he fights Nazis and Soviet agents. Think of Princess Leia in *Star Wars—A New Hope* (the first one)—who is in a bind. Luke and Han come to rescue her, but when the rescue doesn't go as planned, she grabs Luke's blaster, shoots at the stormtroopers and declares, "*Somebody* has to save our skins!" There are even examples of movies featuring preachers who are quite mild-mannered but, threaten their congregation, and they will kick in the door and look like they spend as much time practicing marksmanship as they do in Bible study. If Clint Eastwood in *Pale Rider* is an extreme example, think of salt-of-the-earth Father Barry in *On the Waterfront*, who advocates peaceful resistance to evil, but doesn't hesitate to punch Marlon Brando's character and send him flying across the room when he needs a little calming down.

We love the hidden hero, the person who becomes who we want them to be in the face of threat, danger, and the forces of evil. We love the moment when they are revealed as stronger, badder, braver, more durable than they looked, the person not to be trifled or messed with or taken for granted, or else, look out.

There's a lot about hiding and revealing in our lessons for today. In Isaiah, we hear about the servant of the Lord, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made

me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.” This hidden one would be revealed, and then “Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

Kings don’t stand—other people stand in their presence. Princes don’t prostrate themselves—people prostrate before them. But when the Lord reveals this servant “to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel,” to be given “as a light to the nations,” that God’s “salvation may reach to the end of the earth,” people will be amazed. Those who saw “one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers,” will know that this servant is no less than the chosen of the Lord.

We love the hidden hero. And we love the moment when their power is revealed in all its glory.

It could be tempting to imagine Jesus that way. It could be tempting to want Jesus to reveal himself that way, to want him—the unjustly condemned, tortured, and crucified man hanging on a cross—to lose his patience, his temper, his restraint, and tear himself down from the cross and exact revenge on his captors; to want Jesus to summon some super-human physical strength, blast the cross into toothpicks, and go after the whole legion of Roman soldiers who now tremble in shock and terror when they see who Jesus *really* is; to want Jesus to stop being the weak, wounded, defeated man on the cross he appears to be—and be instead the kind of hero we want him to be.

We’re not alone. Way before Hollywood, and in real life, people taunted Jesus to reveal his true self, or what they thought that would look like. Soldiers scoff, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” (Luke 23:37); a criminal calls out, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself, and us!” (Luke 23:39); passersby cry, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (Matt 27:40); chief priests, along with the scribes and elders, mock, “He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him” (Matt 27:42). In other words, you don’t look like a king, a Messiah, a Son of God. Transform yourself into our version of a hero, and then we’ll believe.

But Jesus won’t do it. He won’t transform into our version, the hero we want him to be. He stays on the cross—the hero and savior we need.

When some Greeks come to Philip and say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” we get all excited. What an evangelism opportunity! And people actually come asking, none of that messy going out to people where they are with the Good News! They just come!

Philip, along with Andrew, goes to Jesus to tell him about this great chance to impress. Jesus starts off in a promising way: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Excellent! We’ve been waiting for this moment! The hidden hero will peel off the outer layer, duck into the phone booth, find exactly the right words, cast the right spell, roll up his sleeves, pick up his weapon... But then Jesus starts talking about death: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” His glorification comes on the

cross, not in spite of it. On the cross—not escaping from it. On the cross—not smashing, avoiding, outwitting, or faking it.

Notice this. Keep this in mind as this week unfolds: Jesus' glorification comes on Good Friday when he looks like—when he *is* exactly who he is—a victim of torture and injustice, not when he strides forth in glowing robes. Don't rush to Easter and miss this truth.

Don't miss it, because Jesus says this is *our* path to glorification too: "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." This is the type of hero Jesus wants us to be. No secret powers or arsenals or strength. No place for them or need for them in the plot. Just the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the strength of God.

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

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