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Mark 14:32-42

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³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ “*Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?” ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹ Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

The Word of the Lord (**Thanks be to God**)

There is a story that comes out of Ancient Greece about a kingdom without a king...

An oracle said that the next man to enter the city with an ox-cart would become the new king.

In comes Gordias, strolling into the kingdom...

A peasant farmer with an ox-cart...

So Gordias is immediately declared the king of Phrygia.

As the story goes, the ox-cart was dedicated to one of the gods and tied to a post in the palace...

It was tied not with an ordinary knot though...

The knot was made of several knots so tightly entangled that it was impossible to see just how they were held together...

It was the impossible knot.

(If you've ever heard of the Gordian knot, this is where it comes from)

The ox-cart remained tied up in the palace by this impossible knot for some time.

And then another oracle came out:

Any man who was able to undo the knot would rule all of Asia.

Alexander the Great came along and tried to untie the knot...

He tried to work through the impossible Gordian knot.

After he was unsuccessful in his attempts, he decided to draw his sword...

And with one stroke he sliced the knot in half.

And as we well know, Alexander the Great conquered a vast empire that went from Greece to India.

And so the legend goes...

Alexander the Great...knot-cutter.

The title of this sermon is "No Knot Cutting."

I took this phrase from something Eugene Peterson says in one of his books.

He was a pastor for many decades and a professor at Regent College in Vancouver.

In his book, *The Pastor*, he's talking about our tendency to come up with simplistic solutions to really complex problems....

Slicing through life's knots.

In the book he's counseling people and helping them to understand that life does not always have simple answers...

He says, "Please, no cutting of knots."

Sometimes you have to put in the tough painstaking work of trying to undo the knot...

To actually work through the mess to get to the solution.

Humanity has tied themselves into one big, Gordian knot...

We have made an impossible knot.

In the beginning, God created man and woman...

He created them in his image,

And he created them good.

But then they disobeyed God...

They decided to rebel against God and set humanity on a collision course with death.

We are told that sin entered the world through this one man...

And death therefore came to all people (Romans 5:12).

Let's take a quick look at our family album...

Some snapshots of what happened after sin entered the world.

First our brother Cain...

Spilling the blood of his brother Abel.

Or our distant relative the Levite who gave up his female servant to be raped by a group of men...

She was left for dead outside of the house and later cut up into 12 pieces (Judges 19).

Or how about David, a man after God's own heart...

Our brother David who impregnated a married woman and had her husband killed (2 Sam 11).

Or David's son who raped his half-sister.

Or our brother Jonah, who preferred to see a whole city full of people destroyed rather than tell them to turn from their wickedness.

Or King Herod (we'd rather not claim him as our ancestor), because he ordered the killing of all boys 2 years old and under around Bethlehem.

These are just snapshots of what humanity became after sin entered the world...

A big mess...a big knot.

How about today?

Has science and technology improved the way we interact with each other?

Have we progressed at all in the last 2 or 3 thousand years?

The holocaust; genocide in Rwanda; genocide in Sudan; bodies of refugees washing up on Mediterranean beaches; women and children being sold into slavery; mass shootings; bombings; people living on the streets while others live in mansions; drugs; crime; domestic violence; divorce; infidelity...

The list goes on and on.

And what about your life?

Where do you see evidence of the fall in your life?

Evidence of a sinful, broken world...

In fighting with your parents or with your spouse?

In feeling the wounds brought on by infidelity or divorce?

In knowing the darkness of walking with a loved one through their illness?

Is it in the guilt and shame of giving into the same old habits?

Maybe you experience the frailty of the aging human body...

With their sin our ancestors set us on a crash course with death...

And all we do is make the problem worse.

We are in a big mess...

You could say that our predicament is like the Gordian knot...

Impossible to solve.

No way of undoing the death, pain, and chaos brought on by our sin.

But some of us may ask:

“Why doesn’t God take a page from Alexander the Great knot cutter?”

“Why doesn’t he just use his power to slash right through the knot?”

After all, look at God’s track record:

With just the sound of his voice he created the heavens and the earth...

“Let there be light...” and POOF...there was light!

Why was it “easier” for God to create the whole world, than it is for him to fix it?

On this Good Friday we talk a lot about suffering.

We've heard the story of Jesus' crucifixion...

Of his being mocked and spit on and physically assaulted...

Of his being nailed to a cross and lifted from the ground...

So that all of his weight hung on his pierced hands and feet.

In our sermon passage we read about Jesus despairing in Gethsemane:

“He took Peter, James, and John with him and he began to be *deeply distressed* and troubled.” (14:33)

This is not the first time Mark uses this word—to be distressed...

In other contexts it can mean amazed or overwhelmed.

When Jesus cast out demons and performed miracles earlier on in Mark's Gospel this same word is used:

All of the people were *amazed* at his teaching and authority (1:27).

When Jesus comes down from the mountain after being transfigured...

He comes down with a radiant glow and the people are *amazed* (9:15).

This word has been used to describe the people's reaction to Jesus...

How overwhelmed they feel by his presence and by his actions...

And now this same word is used to describe the overwhelming *despair* of Jesus.

We saw him 3 times earlier in the Gospel predict his suffering and death...

And with a “sovereign objectivity” he calmly informed his disciples that he would be handed over, suffer and die (Eugene Boring).

But now in Gethsemane the Son of Man is overwhelmed with grief and despair...

“Even to the point of death” we're told.

Jesus is not just facing the reality of his impending death—

The whips with hooks on the end tearing at the flesh on his back;

the thorns pressed deep into his head;

the nails driven through flesh, muscle, and nerves;

and the accompanying loss of air as his body hangs on the cross...

His physical death is not his only reality...

Jesus is in an “ongoing battle for the salvation of the world” (Joel Marcus, 984).

Jesus is facing the ultimate knot.

God's wrath against sin, and his judgment of humanity are wrapped up in this image of "the cup" that we read about in verse 36.

He pleads with the Father to take "this cup" from him.

The final judgment of God is about to be absorbed by the body and soul of Jesus...

And it brings Jesus to his knees...

In Gethsemane he is overwhelmed and filled with terror at what is up ahead.

Ever since the fall of humanity...

Ever since our first ancestors chose to turn their back on God...

God has been working out his plan of salvation for us.

He's been working on bringing us back into the family.

In the beginning he spoke and the world was created...

But now it's taken thousands of years and a lot more people to bring this plan to fulfillment.

God cannot just wave a hand over the world and redeem it...

Our mess is not that easy to undue...

Our knot is too complicated for God to just slash through with a sword.

Once God created the world...

Once God created us...creatures that could make their own decisions...

God bound himself to his creation...and all of the complexities that came attached...

Once he created us...He took a deep loving to us.

Listen to what Scott Hozee, a Calvin Seminary professor says about it:

God wanted to maintain the original integrity of all that he made and so he could not just look at the wreckage of a fallen world and decide to lay down a whole new layer of brand new blacktop to start over. You could not just pave over the wreckage. The pieces had to come back together in ways that would still honor the original intention for the whole thing. And that's hard.

It's hard because sin is so pervasive and complex...

It sucks the life out of all creation.

“Whatever else sin and evil may be, never underestimate how perilous [full of risk and danger] they are, how difficult it is to extract life back out of a creation that keeps choosing death.” (Scott Hozee)

And so God cannot just cut the knot and make everything right.

God has to meet sin on its own terms...

God has to work from the inside out...

Meeting the suffering and death caused by sin with his own suffering and death...

So that God can maintain the original intention for his creation.

This is the only way for God to bring about salvation for his people...

Through the suffering of his own Son.

Through God's own suffering.

God does not cut knots...

He does not take the easy way out...because that wouldn't work.

Because Christ suffered in his life here on earth...

He delivered us from the cup that was meant for us...

He delivered us from the wrath that was due to us because of our sin.

We have a suffering Savior.

A God who went to great lengths to love us...

A God who was determined to get us out of our mess...

To untangle the Gordian knot we made with our sin.

And so we know...

We have a deep assurance and confidence...

Every time we look at the cross...

That God is with us when we walk through pain...

We know that we are never alone.

Christ walked through the pain and the suffering to gain our freedom...

To gain our comfort here in life and in death.

By his wounds we are healed.

And every time we meet together at his table...

We're reminded of his love for us...

And we're spiritually joined with him.

Something happens at this table...

Something that words cannot explain.

At this table we are joined to the broken body of Christ...

We're joined to his suffering and death...

And we're joined to his resurrection and his life.

At this table we participate in the true body and blood of Christ, given and poured out for us.

With God, there is no knot cutting...

There is no taking the easy way out.

He loves us so much that he goes through the pain of slowly working out our salvation.

And now he invites us to join him at his table.