



2023 LENTEN SERMON SERIES

ATTEMPTED

MURDER

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Date: March 4 and 5, 2023
Preacher: Rev. Howard-John Wesley
Sermon Title: Lenten Series, Part I: Attempted Murder
Scripture: John 5:9b-18 NIV

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

SERMON SUMMARY

Pastor Wesley begins this powerful sermon series, "Attempted Murder", by reminding us that Jesus died for our sins, but was executed for very different reasons. This week's sermon raises three reasons the Pharisees sought to murder Jesus, including:

- Jesus threatens the protection of their privilege. We must never underestimate the extremes that privilege will go to protect itself, or the habit privilege has of asking those without it to wait just a little while longer.
- Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of their holiness. The Pharisees focused more on the rituals and traditions of their religion, and were less concerned about the things that were important to God.
- Jesus reveals the impotence of their independence. The Pharisees are far from God and thus independent from God. Without a dependence on God, they have no power to heal, deliver, or provide aid.

KEY POINTS

- There are three covenant marks of Israel: circumcision, dietary laws and the Sabbath.
- The issues most important to God (e.g., prayer, studying the Word, fasting and serving others) were missing from the Pharisees' ritual practices of religion.
- God is bigger than the box in which humans seek to encase the divine.
- Jesus understood the urgency of now.
- Rituals, rules and religious practices should not take priority over the welfare of God's people.
- People in power, and with privilege, will sacrifice others to preserve their 'right' to define and describe the boundaries of exclusivity.

Village Members and Facilitators,

The Curriculum Team does not expect you to cover all the questions.

We ask facilitators to choose the best questions for your Village from each section.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

1. This sermon reminds us that the annual calendar of the church (that begins with Advent and ends with Pentecost) does not match the January through December calendar. When you were a child, were you aware of the church calendar? Did you observe Advent, Lent, or Pentecost? What are your memories from that time?
2. For the most part, the first 30 years of Jesus' life were spent in anonymity. While little is known about this period or his actions, Jesus must have been shaped by the experiences of his past. Thinking about the first 30 years of your life, other than family, what were the most important factors shaping you? What experiences helped shape you?

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. The Pool of Bethesda is the site of those in need of healing (John 5:9b-18). When Jesus arrives at the pool, he asks the man, "Do you want to be made well?" At first, the man makes excuses. Why, after 38 years, did this lame man not immediately answer Jesus' question with a "YES!?" Why would he make excuses? Have you ever been presented with an opportunity for blessings or deliverance and you were unsure if you should accept it? Why were you reticent? What did this situation teach you?

2. Circumcision, dietary laws, and keeping the Sabbath laws were the most important topics in the minds of the Pharisees. These laws delineate the difference in the Jewish people and all others. Pastor Wesley points out what is missing from the list, issues such as caring for the immigrants, prayer, studying the word of God, and healing the sick. As you consider what is on the Pharisees list and what is not, what do you think they value the most and why? And are these the things that concern God?

3. It was brought to our attention that for the majority of the first 30 years of Jesus' life, he lived in obscurity and was a "nobody from Nazareth." (John 1:46) However, in the final 3-year span he engages in ministry, has followers that include prostitutes and fishermen, and lands on the Pharisees 'most wanted' list which ultimately leads to him being killed. If the time span for Jesus' relevancy and movement had started sooner (i.e. 10-year span instead of a 3-year span), do you think the outcome would have been the same? How do you think his influence would have been impacted?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. When Jesus described his oneness with God, the Pharisees called it blasphemy. Has your closeness or dependence on God ever led to you being bullied or criticized? If so, explain what happened and how you handled it.

2. In this sermon, we learn to "Never underestimate the extremes to which privilege will go to protect itself." Privilege protects the status quo. Where have you seen privilege protect what *was*, in order to maintain what *is*? How can we break down strongholds of privilege to make a change in the world?

3. Jesus healing the lame man on the Sabbath instead of waiting until the next day showed that addressing the man's infirmity was an urgent matter. What are some specific opportunities for the church to demonstrate the "urgency of now" when it comes to showing love to people or changing our society for the better?

4. Dependence is not always viewed as a positive attribute. In our culture, independence is prized. But, Jesus proclaims that his dependence on God is the source of his power and the Pharisees' independence from God is what makes them impotent. When have you sought dependence on God, and when have you suffered from being too far from God? What does a healthy relationship of dependence on God look like, and how does one achieve it?

“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS?

1. At the beginning of this sermon, Pastor Wesley reminds us that Jesus **died for our sins**, but was **killed for other reasons**. In our contemporary society people of privilege exact extrajudicial killings against black and brown ‘nobodies from Nazareth’. For instance, black men were stopped, interrogated, and died because of air fresheners hanging in their cars, non-working tail lights, and selling single cigarettes. But **they were killed** for other reasons.
 - a. In your estimation why were Daunte Wright (stopped for an air freshener), Malcolm Williams (stopped for a broken tail light), and Eric Garner killed (selling single cigarettes)
 - b. What does Jesus' story teach us about the stories of these three brothers?
2. “Privilege always has the luxury of waiting.” But, when we occupy a position of marginalization, the luxury of waiting evaporates and the fierce urgency of now calls us to action. As you look at our world, where do you sense or see the fierce urgency of now? And what are you willing to do about it? What would you call the church to do immediately?
3. Just as the Sanhedrin council ignored the ills of their time, some religious leaders today are silent on police brutality, sex trafficking, gun control, voting rights, mass incarceration, the opioid crisis and more. What impact do you think this has on the Body of Christ, particularly in recent years where the number of professed Christians has declined?

ACTIVITY

Psalm 42:1 begins with “As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after thee.” This Psalm has been used as the basis for contemplative pieces of music, such as this one:

<https://youtu.be/LthkibTzuj8>. After listening to this musical selection, offer a prayer to God about the state of your soul and your longing for God. If you do not long for God, you may wish to invite God to settle a longing in your soul.

SPIRIT WORK

Matthew 23:3-4 reads, “So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.” Meditate on this warning and think about what load you could/should be helping to carry - at home, work or within the ministry of Alfred Street.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Within the structure of Village, there are various affinity groups.

Each week the team creates questions specifically for these individual groups.

However, any village may draw from the questions listed below if the Spirit so moves.

For Married Couples

1. Independence, interdependence and dependence are positions of relationship along a spectrum. As a couple, when is independence from one another important? When are dependence and interdependence important? How do you as a couple learn to jointly depend on God?
2. Matthew 23:1-3, begins like this: “Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.’ ” This text reminds us that a person’s actions and words do not always match. Is there a path you seek to follow in your marriage, but when you examine your actual actions as a spouse they do not match your goals? What is that action, and how can you better align your words and your walk?

For Young Adults

1. Have you ever had to release a relationship/friendship because you and the other person were not aligned regarding the need to be dependent on God? Which one were you? Were you the one leaning on God, or leaning away from God? What did this experience teach you?
2. This sermon points out the rituals that marked the Jewish people, separating them from all others. The rituals **centered** around laws that instructed the Jews on what to eat, how to observe the Sabbath, and the marks necessary on the body of men. What marks you as a follower of Christ? What about your life is observable to others that would communicate to them you belong to the community formed and guided by Jesus?

For Parents

1. For the first three decades of his life, no one knew Jesus' name. Sometimes, our children find their gifts and strengths at a different pace than their peers. This can make them feel as if they are less than and left behind. Can the story of Jesus' evolution from 'no one' to 'someone' help guide those children who bloom later?
2. Matthew 23:1-3, begins like this, "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach." This text reminds us that a person's actions and words do not always match. Is there a lesson that you seek to teach your children, but when you examine your life as a parent, your actions do not always match? What is that action? Now that you notice it, what might you do to bring alignment into your words and walk?

For Seniors

1. The Pharisees were focused on ritual. Have you ever observed rituals or traditions in the church that hinder the spirituality and growth of the church body, or individuals within the church? What were those rituals or traditions? Have they been broken, or do they still operate? What do they cost the church and her members? If you could, how would you reframe or change said rituals and traditions?
2. Let's have a moment of truth telling. In your past, have you ever been threatened by someone who has the power to pinpoint aspects of your life that are not fully aligned with God? Who was that truth-teller in your life? In hindsight, as you reflect on your experience with this person, was it helpful or harmful? What would life be if we never encountered those who can call us to tell the truth about ourselves and move into a fuller, deeper version of the person God designed us to be?

For Women

1. When you realize how dependent you are on God, it will quickly identify for you the people in your world that are detached from God. How does your relationship with God affect the relationships you enter with others? Have there been people that you've had to end relationships with because of your walk with God? If so, how did you handle it?
2. The Pharisees majored in the minor things of rituals and traditions, missing the major things of caring for the sick, and rejoicing at the healing of the man. Have you ever majored in minor things, missing the truly important for the merely present? When did this happen in your life and how did you refocus on that which was truly important?

For Men

1. The word *hypocrite* comes to us from a Greek understanding of someone who wears a figurative mask and pretends to be someone or something they are not. Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees' holiness. They wear a mask but do not care about the man at the pool. Where have you worn a figurative mask, saying one thing but doing another? What is the cost of being hypocritical?

2. The Pharisees want to murder Jesus because he is “threatening the protection of their privilege”. Those with privilege and in power want to protect and preserve the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Who do you see as having privilege in our nation? Give an example of the ways in which those with privilege are setting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in negative ways? Are there any people with privilege who are setting those boundary lines in positive ways?

For Returning Citizens

1. It was brought to our attention that for the majority of the first 30 years of Jesus’ life, he lived in obscurity and was a “nobody from Nazareth.” However, in the final 3-year span he engages in ministry, has followers that include prostitutes and fishermen, and lands on the Pharisees ‘most wanted’ list which ultimately leads to him being killed. If the time span for Jesus’ relevancy and movement had started sooner (i.e. 10- year span instead of a 3-year span), do you think the outcome would have been the same? How do you think his influence would have been impacted?
2. Jesus spent his early days walking with and engaging those on the margins of society. We hear in this sermon that Jesus began his ministry hanging out with fisherman, prostitutes and the like on the outskirts, in the rural regions. He did not begin his ministry in the high and mighty places, but with the low and left out. Why do you think this is the case? What is it about the marginalized that attracts Jesus’ attention and work? How should this shape our ministry focus?

For Differently-Abled Persons/People

1. The Pharisees watched the lame man suffer at the pool of Bethesda for more than 35 years and, despite having considerable resources, apparently did little or nothing to help him. Jesus saw the lame man's suffering, relieved him, and told him to be a witness of his healing power. How is the church using Jesus' model to address the physical and spiritual needs of all God’s children?

2. Jesus was born to humble circumstances and his early life did not garner attention or interest. In fact, the sermon reminds us that Jesus was a nobody. Remembering John 1:46, we wonder with the writer if any good thing can come out of Nazareth. Many of us began life under humble beginnings. Has anyone ever looked at you and intimated that they do not believe your humble beginnings would lead to anything good? How do you counter the negative impact of others? How do you encourage your own soul that you are made in the image and likeness of God and are the very best of God's handiwork?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Pastor Wesley noted there are seven seasons of the church year. While Baptists do not observe all of these seasons, if you are curious you can learn more about Advent, Christmastime, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary time by clicking this link, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/calendar-church-year/>
2. For more information on dietary laws, circumcision, and Sabbath Keeping, please see the following links.
 - a. Dietary Laws
 - i. https://www.jewfaq.org/kosher_dietary_laws
 - b. Circumcision
 - i. <https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-power-of-circumcision/>
 - c. Sabbath Keeping
 - i. <https://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat>
3. In this sermon we hear some terms that describe aspects of Jewish life. Which of these terms did you know? Take a moment to learn a bit more about these items.
 - d. The *Shema*
 - i. *Shema Yisrael* is a Jewish prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. Its first verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism: "Hear, O Israel: YHWH is our God, YHWH is one", found in Deuteronomy 6:4.
 - e. The Tallit
 - i. A tallit is a fringed garment worn as a prayer shawl by religious Jews. The *tallit* has special twined and knotted fringes known as tzitzit attached to its four corners.
 - f. The Torah
 - i. In Judaism the law of God was revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, also known as the *Pentateuch*.