

February 25, 2018

Your Redeemer's Conflict Series: "Conflicted"

Mark 14:32-36

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

Certain visual images quickly tell a story about conflict. We live in a world filled with conflicts. We deal with conflicts of our own every day. But often a simple visual image conjures up a familiar tale of conflict.

Some of these are conflicts that are lodged in our national memory. Others have played out on the international stage. And sometimes we're not familiar with the particular image, but we can easily relate to the conflict portrayed.

What about this one? What's the story of conflict told in this image? And what does this conflict have to do with us?



This may appear a peaceful, serene setting. A solo figure relaxing in the evening, meditating in an olive grove. But it was anything but peaceful, and far from serene, for Jesus. Do you know the story?

On the night before he was crucified, Jesus Christ experienced a massive, severe conflict in the garden of

Gethsemane. It wasn't just the conflict that had been brewing between Jesus and his enemies. The religious leaders of the people couldn't stand Jesus, and they were determined to get rid of him. Jesus, kneeling in the garden, knew that his adversaries were on their way, only minutes away, and that their conflict would take a deadly turn that very night.

But there was an even greater conflict going in the garden. Jesus was conflicted inside. He was torn. Torn between what he knew he was supposed to do, and what he preferred to do. Torn between what he knew God had planned for him, and what he wanted.

And what an incredible story this conflict was. Jesus, the Son of God, had been sent on a very specific mission. His task was to give up his life for us, to pay for all the lousy sins we've ever committed, and all the world's sins. He knew exactly what he'd be facing: betrayal, injustice, rejection, suffering, crucifixion, death, burial.

But now, here he was, on Thursday night, in the final hour before all this unspeakable agony went down.

On the inside, he was dreading it. He knew what he was supposed to do; but Jesus, understandably, craved some other way. He was conflicted. Should he plunge ahead with his mission? Suffer the worst, vilest torment ever? Die for the likes of hopeless, habitual sinners like us? Or find some way to save his own innocent, sinless self?

We see Jesus, collapsing with grief in the garden. He was still truly God. He was all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, all of that. But he was, at the same time, still truly human. He was just like you and me, shuddering at the prospect of an indescribable horror.

This visual image tells a story of Jesus conflicted. Our Lord, our Savior, intensely, achingly conflicted.

What does his conflict story have to do with us? As Christians, we have plenty of our own conflicts, don't we? Family disputes, marriage problems, political and racial divides, neighborhood HOA clashes.

But we also have these awful internal conflicts, like Jesus did. So often we're conflicted between following God's directions and following our own urges. Sometimes we know how we're supposed to act -- we know what the right thing to do is -- but we'd rather do what we feel like doing. You and I have this battle going on inside every day, don't we? Our sinful self struggling for control against our spiritual self.

When you're conflicted like that, keep this visual image in your mind. Remember his story. Turn where Jesus turned, in his conflict.

The Bible tells us Jesus pleaded with his heavenly Father that night. Can you read verse 36 with me? *"And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"* What a perfect prayer! And what a perfect faith response for us to imitate when we're conflicted!

Jesus starts by expressing confidence in God's supreme power. *"Father, all things are possible for you."* In our moments of suffering, we have to acknowledge that everything is possible with God. He is the One, ultimately, who has the final say.

Jesus goes on to make his request, and we learn that it's OK for us to make requests of God. *"Remove this cup from me,"* he begs, *"this cup of suffering."* He's not being insubordinate with this request. He's not refusing to follow the path laid out for him. He just asks for the possibility of change. He

explores the limits of the purpose God has for him. And, yes, as God's beloved children, we can do the same. It's permissible for us to ask questions like that, to seek redirections from our God. The person who fully trusts God can always talk to God, and respectfully ask for relief.

But then comes the ending to Jesus' prayer. And this is the real lesson you and I have to take home from this story. Jesus asks to be relieved of his task; but then he humbly adds, "*Yet not what I will, but what you will.*" Jesus submits his preference to God's final decision. Jesus says, "I want this, but only if it's in accord with what you want."

When we're conflicted, when we're struggling between what God wants and what we want, this is the step of faith we need to take. Submit what you want to God's final decision. Set what you desire below what God decides.

Not just because God's the boss. Not just because you have to tremble with fear before him. But because you trust in his wisdom. You have faith in his goodness. You believe in your heavenly Father's promise to see you through all of your conflicts, all of your struggles. Trust in God to make the final call. And believe -- that because he is wise, compassionate and gracious beyond all measure -- he will make the right call for you, in the end.

In your moments of crisis and conflict, remember Jesus' story, and follow his lead. "*Not what I will,*" we pray with Jesus to our loving heavenly Father, "*but what you will.*" Amen.