

March 11, 2018

Mark 18:1-9

“Who’s My Responsibility This Week?”

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Who, would you say, is your responsibility? If you’re a parent, you know. You’re responsible for your kids. If you’re a husband or a wife, you know. You’re responsible for your spouse, for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer. Teachers? Responsible for their students. Doctors? For patients. Ushers? Responsible for everyone who wants their offering collected. Who’s your responsibility?

What about that guy sitting in the median at the stoplight with a sign, asking for a handout? What about that new family that just moved into your neighborhood? What about the hurricane victims still suffering down in Puerto Rico, or down in Lumberton? Are you responsible, in any way, for any of them?

Today’s Bible story raises this topic of responsibility. Jesus, even in a moment of extreme personal danger, takes responsibility for his friends’ safety and protection.

Our Lord is in the garden of Gethsemane. It’s Thursday night, the night before his death. He’s been praying, conflicted, agonizing; but now Jesus knows his hour is at hand. Judas, his own disciple, betrays him, arriving with a band of Roman soldiers and a bunch of religious officials. They crowd into the garden, ready to search for and seize Jesus.

But notice the details of the story. Take note of who’s really in control of this situation. Jesus, knowing exactly what’s happening, steps up to meet them. Boldly, assertively, he asks, “Whom do you seek?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they reply. Jesus proclaims, “I am he.”

And, when he speaks these words, the whole bunch of soldiers and officials fall to the ground. As only God can do, Jesus speaks but a word, and his word has tremendous effect. They all collapse!

Jesus asks them a second time, “Whom do you seek?” Again, they answer, “Jesus of Nazareth.” “I told you that I am he.” We see Jesus, commanding the situation, causing his enemies to say out loud, two times, that he’s the one they’re after, not the others.

Then we learn why. Jesus declares, “So if you seek me, let these men go.” Let these men – my disciples, weak in faith and limited in understanding though they may be – let these men go.”

And so they do. They grab Jesus, but they let the others go free. And Jesus’ enemies think that now they finally have what they want. But it’s really Jesus who has now what he wants.

You see, even while he’s in severe personal danger, Jesus wants to keep his disciples safe. He knows he’s about to suffer horribly and die terribly, but still Jesus is thinking about his responsibility. “Let these men go,” he says.

We can, and we should, marvel, in these days of Lent, at how Jesus was fully dedicated to serving and helping others. This particular story magnifies his sense of responsibility. But it wasn’t just this one time in the garden. Wasn’t our Lord’s whole mission on earth centered on this one selfless, glorious goal? Jesus came to save sinners. He lived, he died, he rose again, to save sinners.

At his arrest, he says, “Let these men go. I’m the one you want.” At his crucifixion, he says, “Let these sinners all go. I’m taking their punishment.” At our judgment day, when we stand before the judgment seat of God, and he asks us,

“Why should I let you into my heaven?” Jesus will intercede and say, of us, “Let these men and women and girls and boys who have faith in me go. Let them in. I’ve done everything needed to save them. They’re sinners. But I love them. I died for them, and I’m responsible for them.”

Isn’t that the essence of our Christian faith? Isn’t that the Gospel that we cherish and treasure? Jesus came to save sinners, you and me! And today’s story, from the garden of Gethsemane, lays it out so beautifully. Jesus, in the garden, takes responsibility for others -- just as in his death Jesus takes responsibility for us.

But it doesn’t stop there. The story doesn’t end with Jesus taking responsibility. Ask yourself again: Who, would you say, is your responsibility? Who is your Christian, Christ-like responsibility?

Jesus came to save sinners. Is the Christian mission today any different? The responsibility of this church, the responsibility of the individual Christ-follower, is to help others be saved. Bring others to know Jesus. You and me, let them know of his forgiveness, his salvation.

Who’s your responsibility? We learn today from Jesus not to be self-focused, not to be stingy with grace; but to be outward-focused, to be liberal with God’s grace in our dealings with others.

As Christians, we are responsible for others constantly. Serving others, helping others. Teaching them, loving them, forgiving them. Witnessing to them, telling them the amazing grace story of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So when it comes to all that, who’s your responsibility? Certainly, none of us can ever be fully responsible for all of the hurting, lost, soul-sick people out there. You can’t help everyone that needs help. You and I don’t have all the

answers for anyone's needs, and we all have to guard against being overly responsible for others' happiness or well-being.

But here's what we can do, every one of us, as Christian disciples. Ask the Lord Jesus to help you with this. Add this little question to your prayers, every day this week. Ask the Lord, "Who's my responsibility this week?" Thank your Savior for taking full responsibility for you. But then ask him this question. "Who's my responsibility this week?"

Who's the one person that Jesus wants you to help, or serve, or encourage, in some small way, this week? Give this a try in your prayer life. Ask the Lord to direct you toward just one person this week, to take responsibility for that person in some specific, sacrificial, selfless, Christ-like way.

I challenge you to try this. Not to prove yourself to God. Not to earn points with him during Lent. But simply as a way of thanking God for Jesus, who is fully responsible for you.

Let's pray together. "Thank you, God, that Jesus is responsible for us, sinners that we are. Thank you, God, that Jesus saved us from our sins. Please give each of us the answer to this question, Lord. Who's my responsibility this week? Amen."