

“When Your Best Really Counts”

Mark 15:16-39

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Communion Devotion

I did not hear it. As our text was read a moment ago, I listened carefully thinking I might hear something ugly that Jesus said or did while being mocked, abused and crucified, but it was not there.

There were many ugly things said and done, that's for sure, but none by Jesus. There was no shortage of verbal and physical abuse, instigated by the religious leaders.

“Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him” Mark 15:16-20.

Just listening to this story dripping with sarcasm and insults makes me cringe. How could anyone treat another human this way, much less a man as good as Jesus? Mark must have wrestled with this, too, because he focused more upon the behavior of those that crucified Jesus than the details of the crucifixion.

How did Jesus respond to their abuse and die? He died the same way he lived, with strength, courage, dignity, compassion and grace. He did not turn on his tormentors, did he? No hateful words came from his mouth, as a matter of fact, just the opposite occurred. Luke tells us that Jesus pleaded for God to be merciful toward those hurting him when he said, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” Without a doubt, Jesus demonstrated the radical nature of grace.

How do you think Jesus' accusers reacted to the way he died? I think they were shocked. *I believe they thought their worst would bring out his worst.* It usually had this effect on people. Most died spewing the same venom they received, but not Jesus. Their worst brought out his best. So noticeable was this contrast that the centurion standing guard remarked, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

There is a lesson here for us, isn't there? Anyone can rise to lofty heights when everyone is pulling for him or her. To do so in the midst of adversity, when others are against you, is another matter. This gets people's attention. It turns heads.

Have you ever done this? Have you shocked people by responding to a situation differently than people thought you would? Have you confronted hate with love or anger with compassion? Have you refused to let others tell you who you must hate and hurt? Have you decided that the way to rid the world of violence is not with more violence or the time to settle a dispute is not after you have sought revenge?

Does the worst in others bring out the best in you? It did Jesus and it should us, too, if we are his disciples.

“Why should I forgive and not retaliate?” I have been asked several times by people that have been hurt? “You do it because of who you are as a follower of Christ,” I reply, “not because of what has happened to you.”

I think we have something to think about during this communion service. Who is the hardest person for you to love? What do you want to do to someone that has mistreated you or a member of your family? What will happen if their worst brings out your worst? What message will this send to those watching you?

What alternative do you have? Who has modeled a different response? How can you respond to someone’s worst behavior with your best? How could this change the relationship in the future?

I think we not only have some questions to consider but some things about which we need to pray. Do this as we remember the one who was at his best when others were at their worst and is eager to help us follow his lead.