

CONCORDIA SEMINARY, ST. LOUIS



**YOU MEANT IT FOR EVIL,
BUT GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD**

*AN ASH WEDNESDAY THROUGH EASTER SUNDAY
SERMON SERIES BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE*

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INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

1. Although the sermons are fully written out, I have written them not for the eye, but for the ear. The style is “oral”—at times, extremely so. Feel free (at the least!) to adapt that style to your own.
2. Liturgical suggestions
 - a. Each pastor knows the context, and what liturgies/worship forms to use for evening services, the special services of Holy Week and Easter, etc. Local needs and traditions should be observed and preserved.
 - b. A repeated office hymn, sung at every one of the services, would help to support the series’ continuity. One suggestion is Lutheran Service Book #436, “Go to Dark Gethsemane.” This is familiar to many and not too long. Unlike many Lenten hymns, it explicitly brings the account of our salvation all the way to Easter morning (“Early hasten to the tomb”), and that is exceedingly appropriate in general, and specifically for this sermon series.
 - c. It seems likely that both Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday would employ a fuller liturgy, perhaps a full divine service form from LSB.
 - d. I recommend a shorter liturgical form for the midweek services; people are tired. Evening Prayer (LSB 243–252) works very well, in my opinion.
3. Scripture readings
 - a. This will depend in part on the liturgical forms used locally.
 - b. The sermon series has a strong textual, almost expository feel throughout. This is deliberate on my part.
 - c. It would be fitting (although not required, of course) if the only Scripture reading for a given midweek services were the portion from Luke on which the sermon for that service is based. If Evening Prayer is used, I would encourage that the portion from Luke be read *twice*—once as the (sole) reading, and then at the beginning of the sermon. There is a deep need for Christians to practice careful reading of and attending to Scriptural texts. This more expository series, I prayerfully hope, will offer that sort of an experience.

SERMON 1: ASH WEDNESDAY

“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”

In the beautiful rhythm of the church year, here we are again. It's Lent, a time to reflect and repent, to pray and to praise, to recall and rejoice in our Lord Jesus as he moves humbly toward the cross and powerfully in victory from the grave. Lent leads us to Easter. It's a time for blessing, as we wait for the return of our Jesus.

Here's another blessing. The Holy Spirit gave to us not one, but FOUR books, FOUR Gospels. Each of them is about the same Jesus. Each of them tells of Jesus's movement toward the cross and his bursting forth from the tomb. And yet, each of them is like a beautiful painting or a portrait of Jesus from a slightly different angle. They complement one another—but each gives us its own beautiful perspective for Lent and Easter. This year, we will follow the leading of the Gospel according to Luke. This evening, on Ash Wednesday, as we begin our Lenten journey toward Easter—how shall we sum up Luke's inspired presentation of Jesus?

Before answering that, let me ask another question. Do you recall the story of Joseph from the book of Genesis? Here's a quick summary. Joseph was the favored son of his father, Jacob. His older brothers resented him (and Joseph wasn't faultless in this, of course). But his brothers' hatred grew—so they abused him (evil!), sold him as a slave to traders going to Egypt (evil!), poured animal blood on his coat and told their father Jacob that Joseph has been killed by wild beasts (evil!). In Egypt Joseph's life was up and down, but finally through God's blessing, he rose to prominence in Egypt and God used Joseph's planning and wisdom to save many people from starving to death—including his own father and the brothers who had done such evil things to him.

Then Jacob, the father dies. And Joseph's brothers are afraid that now, Joseph will take his revenge on them. But he doesn't. He says something to them, about their history and about the years that have gone by. He says, “You meant evil against me. But God meant it for good.” Now don't misunderstand Joseph's words. His brothers meant evil against him—and it was evil. They meant evil, and they did evil. God didn't change that part—not at all. But God *used* the evil for a larger purpose even when no one knew what God was up to. Everyone was clueless as to what God was going to do—but God was not clueless. God never is.

It's Lent, and we're going to ponder Luke 22 and 23, and on into the victory of Luke 24. We'll begin by reflecting on the reading you have heard, and we will see some very important truths here. The first truth is this. It's time for a *greater* Passover. Now, Luke goes out of his way to mention no less than five times that it's a particular time of year, and that a particular festival is about to happen: Passover. He says it in verse 1, and then in verses 7 and 8 and 11 and 13. And there's a lot you could say about the Passover, but I'll just say this. Passover was the time when Israel remembered. They remembered that they were living under the thumb, under the power of evil. They were slaves in Egypt, centuries before the night that

Luke is describing. Evil had come against them; evil was done to them. Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt resisted God's plan to set his people Israel free. Even though God sent plague after plague, Pharaoh's heart was hard. And even after Pharaoh allowed Israel to leave ... he changed his mind and hunted them down and chased them through the middle of the Red Sea. He tried to enslave them. He meant to destroy them. Pharaoh wanted to put Israel to death. He meant evil—but God meant it for good, to save Israel, and Pharaoh and his host he drowned in the sea. And God's people were rescued, they stepped out onto dry land, they passed through death and out into life with their God. Their enemies meant it for evil. But God meant it for good.

What God did at Passover long before, what God did through the Exodus from Egypt, God is going to do in a greater way in Jesus, in his Son. That's the first truth that emerges from our reading. It's Passover and it's time for a greater salvation, a greater deliverance than ever before, a greater movement into death, and out again into life.

Here's the second truth. Evil is going to come against Jesus. Evil men of every sort, and Luke emphasizes that *the* evil one, Satan himself, is the driving force behind the plan to destroy Jesus. Just look at the line-up of evil in these verses.

Verse 2—here at the Passover, “the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.” The priests and the scholars who were supposed to guide and uphold the people and prepare them to receive their own Messiah—these men now are looking for a way to put him to death. And Luke says, “for they feared the people.” Did they think that the people would defend Jesus, would stop them from doing evil to him? If they thought that, they overestimated the faith and the courage of the people.

But it's not just these twisted religious leaders. Luke rushes on; verse 3: “Then Satan entered Judas called Iscariot.” Satan! He has been the evil “strong man” who hates God and his ways, and who makes people his captives. In Luke 13 Jesus healed a woman whom Satan had bound with illness for eighteen years. In Luke 10 Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples, and they cast out demons, and Jesus said that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Satan is the strong man, but Jesus is the stronger man who has come to bind Satan. And now the evil one engages in the battle to destroy Jesus.

And Satan uses ... Judas! We may be so accustomed to the story that we don't even feel the shock and the tragedy of that. Even though he was one of the twelve ... Judas! We don't know and we mustn't guess how it happened ... but Judas! And he approaches the chief priests and together they make a plan. They think they need to avoid a crowd—but the crowd will turn on Jesus, too, and cry out for him to be crucified. At the first Passover in Egypt, the evil was bad enough. Now, that evening long ago, it's worse. Evil is coming—against Jesus.

And now a beautiful third truth from this reading. This third truth is made all the more wonderful because of the second truth we just highlighted, that is, the evil in verses 2 through 6. That evil is like the darkness that grows all around you when thunderstorms are building and rushing toward you. Human enemies. A human traitor. The great supernatural enemy. These are all allied, joined together whether they know it or not—against Jesus. And as we know, their plan is going to work even better than they hoped and probably prayed for. Because the people will not defend Jesus; the crowd, too, will cry out for his death, his destruction. Verses 2 through 6 of the reading are filled with evil that is going to happen.

But the third truth emerges when at verse 7 and then four more times, Luke emphasizes something. Five different times, Luke tells us that everything is *ready*; things are *prepared*. “Prepare the Passover ... Where shall we prepare? ... A large upper room furnished ... prepare there ... and they prepared the Passover.” Prepared. Ready. Now we can’t be sure about one point here. It’s certainly possible that the Lord Jesus is here exercising his power as the Son of God to *predict* what will happen: “A man will meet you, follow him, the master of the house will show you,” and so on. But Luke doesn’t say that, and it could also be very ordinary, in a way. The Lord Jesus has made arrangements. He has made sure that things are ready. He’s made sure that everything is prepared.

And that is because Jesus is ready; Jesus is prepared. He knows about the evil, he knows what is coming, he knows that all he will have left is to trust ... and to know ... that the Father’s plan is coming true, that the Father’s plan will come true. That’s why in Luke and only in Luke, the last thing that Jesus says from the cross is, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Evil is coming, and God’s plan—GOD’S PLAN—is for evil to do its worst, for sin and Satan to rule. Jesus says this, only in Luke when he is arrested, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

But Jesus is ready. And he knows that in this greater rescue than Joseph accomplished for his brothers, in this greater exodus than Moses performed, Jesus knows that his enemies meant everything for evil, and that they would do the ultimate evil. But his Father meant it for good, and the greatest salvation of all will come. Peter thinks that he is *ready* to die with Jesus, but he is not. The women don’t believe that Jesus will rise from the dead, and so they get spices *ready* and on that first Easter, they are ready to anoint the corpse of Jesus. But they were wrong. Jesus is ready to face the evil and take it into himself. And he knows that God the Father will raise him from the dead and give a victory over sin and evil that will never pass away. Everything is now ready.

What part are we tempted to play in the evil that comes against Jesus? We’ll explore that this Lenten season, and by God’s grace, once again we’ll repent and turn away from that evil, whatever form it takes in our lives.

What doubts plague you, as you see the power of evil in our world? How often does fear cripple us, and deceive us into thinking that maybe God can be taken off guard, that he wasn’t ready for the evil this time? This Lenten season we’ll open up our fears, our doubts, and we’ll

give them to Jesus because he has undone the evil, because he lives forever. And because he lives, nothing—not death or life or Satan or struggle or anything—nothing can separate us from God’s love in his crucified, risen, ascended, returning Son. Our Jesus. Who was ready.

When the Lenten journey is done, how will our faith be different? Well, in the most important way of thinking, Christian faith is never different—it’s always the same, holding on to God’s promises and relying utterly on Jesus. But this Lent we can pray that our faith will grow, and our grip will tighten as we hold on to Jesus. And we can pray that our mouths will be opened, and we will say to Satan, and to every enemy, and strangely even to ourselves: “You can’t take God by surprise. Jesus is ever ready, ever ready to save and redeem. You meant it for evil. But God meant it for good.” In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SAMPLE

SERMON 2: LENTEN MIDWEEK 1

“He was numbered among the transgressors”

Luke 22:14, 24-38

Think with me for a second about what these words could mean: “I didn’t mean to do that!” If you say it a certain way: “I *didn’t* mean to do that,” or “I didn’t mean to do *that*,” you’re saying that your choices made something happen—but you had no intention of causing *that*.

But if you say, “I didn’t *mean* to do that,” there’s a little wiggle room in that statement. Something bad happened, and you didn’t *mean* to do that—but you realize that you could have stopped it from happening, or maybe worse—you really should have known better. “I didn’t *mean* to do that ... ”

Have you ever watched a certain type of car wreck happen? Some accidents are like lightning, no warning, and so on. But there’s another kind of wreck, and long ago I saw one, and the driver didn’t *mean* to do that, but he really should have known better. There was a red light up ahead: clue #1. There were cars stopped at the red light and their brake lights were showing: clue #2. There was a speed limit: helpful hint, there. But I was driving behind a car that just kept on plowing forward without slowing down and there came a moment when I realized that I was watching a wreck happen. You know how it can feel like slow motion. I saw it coming, and so I was able to not be involved. And thankfully, there were no serious injuries. But that driver who wasn’t paying attention and who hit the brakes too late, and who fishtailed sideways and smacked into the back of that other car—that driver should have known better. I can imagine him saying to the police officer and then to his insurance company, “I didn’t *mean* to do that.” But he did it.

The reading from Luke 22 for tonight reminds me of watching a wreck as it’s starting to happen. The apostles—Jesus’s handpicked inner circle—are there with him in the upper room. And the reading gives us a sort of back and forth, forth and back between the disciples and Jesus, Jesus and the disciples. But it’s painful to watch, and in a way it’s frightening. The evil at work in the events leading up to Jesus’s passion and death ... well, the disciples are participating in that evil. They are engaged in folly, and they are arrogant. But they should have known better. Let’s spend some time now in these verses and watch the spiritual wreck as it unfolds before our eyes.

[READ VERSES 24-27.] If I can be a little bold here, the disciples might be described as ... stupid. A more biblical sounding word would be “folly.” They are caught up in utter folly. There in the upper room, after Jesus has instituted the Lord’s Supper and predicted his betrayal, they get into an argument about which of them is the greatest. How did this happen? It’s hard to reconstruct it, so we won’t try, and Luke doesn’t want us to do that. He only wants us to see the evil of their folly. And it is evil.

Did they mean to do that? Did they mean it for evil? In one sense, probably not. But what about the other sense, where they really should have known better? Yes, they should have known better. They're arguing about who is the greatest ... while in the upper room with the one who actually is the greatest. And Jesus has taught them, and he has *showed* them what true greatness really is. And so, Jesus has to teach them—again. He tells them that they're acting like pagans, like Gentiles, like worldly power brokers and big shots. That's the evil way of thinking about "greatness." And then in verse 26, the ESV translation offers Jesus's words, "But not so with you." That's a good translation. A literal, wooden one would be, "But YOU—not like that!" In this unexpected reign of God that Jesus has been bringing, and of which they have been a central part, status and importance are turned upside-down ... or maybe right-side-up. Jesus is right there, reclining there with them at table ... he tells them that he will take the place of the one who serves at table. Did they "mean for this to happen," for their hearts to get caught up and twisted and focused on a breathtaking folly and evil? Yes—because they should have known better.

Still in the upper room, we keep watching the wreck as it unfolds before our eyes. In verses 28 through 38, Jesus first comforts and then he *warns* his disciples—Simon Peter and then all of the others. But they reject his warning, and they shrug off the master's words. The only thing to call it is arrogance. Pride. Boastfulness. Let's take a look.

Jesus begins with comfort. The apostles are Jesus's chosen, inner circle. They've been with him, and there they are, still with him—for a few more hours, at least. And Jesus makes a remarkable promise about their future; he promises them a share in his kingdom, in his reign. In fact, on the last day the holy apostles will in some mysterious way participate in the judgment. Without taking away from Jesus's unique identity as the judge of the living and the dead, the twelve will sit on thrones as they judge the twelve tribes of Israel. That's what Jesus says! You get a glimpse of this remarkable future promise to the twelve in Revelation 21, with the vision of the new Jerusalem on the last day. When the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, and this earth is renewed, that city will have twelve foundation stones to match the twelve gates. And on the foundation stones are written ... the names of the twelve apostles. Mysteries, here, to be sure, and I can't explain everything that Jesus intends to say. But what a promise!

Why does Jesus make this promise here, now, that night, in the upper room? It's to strengthen and steel the apostles for what is coming, and so after the promise he warns them about what is coming. To Simon Peter, Jesus speaks directly—very directly. Satan is present, Satan is active, Satan is powerful, and he is after not only Simon Peter, but all the apostles: "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to sift you (it's plural, "all of you"), to sift you like wheat." And it's going to be the hardest thing they've ever known. But Jesus's prayer for Simon will mean that after the time of trouble, Simon will turn again in faith, he will return to faith and then he must strengthen the others. Jesus is warning him.

But Simon rejects the warning. “I’m ready,” he says, “to go to prison, and even to die with you!” What? Jesus just told him that he’ll be blasted and twisted ... but that the time will come when he will turn again to faith in Jesus. But Peter says, “No. That won’t happen. I’m ready.” He says that to Jesus’s face. Did Simon Peter *mean* to do that evil? Yes—because he should have known better. He should have listened to Jesus, right there in front of him. And Simon keeps on *not* listening when Jesus says, “You will deny me three times today before the rooster crows.” Peter is not listening; Peter is proud, but that night, when the rooster crows, then he remembers. And his pride is gone. And he weeps bitterly.

The folly and the arrogance don’t stop. Jesus turns to the others and asks them to remember how he sent them out to minister and do miracles (it’s in Luke 9)—and how all their needs were met when they went out in his name. And they remember. “We lacked nothing, Lord,” they say. But now it will be different, Jesus says. Evil is coming. Evil is ... present. And the one perfect man, the one truly innocent man, the master will be counted among transgressors. It’s written in Isaiah. It must come true, and it will come true. So—Jesus says, “Be ready. Prepare yourselves. You’re going to need a sword!”

Is the Lord of gentleness telling them to arm themselves? No—no he’s not. Luke’s alone is the gospel that tells us that Jesus not only stops the sword swinging in Gethsemane, but Jesus then immediately heals the wounded man. He’s not telling them to arm themselves. But that’s how they take it because they’re not listening. They don’t realize that Jesus is warning them, trying to prepare them for how hard it’s going to be. But just as Peter thought he was ready, the rest of them say, “Look! We’ve got two swords already!” And what is the tone in Jesus’s voice when he replies? I’m just guessing, but I think it’s a sad and weary voice: “It is enough.” Enough with your boasting, with your arrogance, enough with your folly. I’m trying to tell you—but you’re not listening. Evil is coming. And they should have known better. And their evil is in the room, with Jesus.

And yet—God is not letting that time in the upper room be wasted. It’s not just a time of misunderstanding, of folly and arrogance. As we watch the wreck unfolding before our eyes, we see God’s plan unfolding, and we see God using evil to move his plan forward. The disciples didn’t mean to do that ... but they should have known better. But God knew better still, and he meant it all for good. Ponder this with me.

The disciples’ folly is like a sign—a huge, unmistakable arrow—that points away from them ... and right at Jesus. Who *is* the greatest among them? Who even understands what true greatness is? While they bicker and fight, only one understands. The folly is all around him—and he stands out so wise, so strong, so lowly, and so great. He is among them—Jesus said that. He is among them as the one—the only one—who serves.

The disciples’ arrogance is like a piece in a puzzle. It’s not the center of the puzzle, thank the Lord. But their evil is part of it, and it fits right into the plan, right into the pattern taking shape as Jesus moves toward the fulfillment, as he says, the fulfillment of what is written

about him. That pattern will bring the great, wise, serving, innocent Son of God into the midst of sinners, of transgressors. That's Isaiah's prophecy: "He was numbered with the transgressors." And as Jesus said, it *must* be fulfilled in him.

When Isaiah is fulfilled, it will be like a rock that is dropped in a pool of water ... and you can watch as the circles get larger and larger. "He was numbered with the transgressors"—yes, and there will be one evildoer on his right, and one on his left. He was numbered with the transgressors—yes, and there at the place called "Skull" all around him are the religious leaders and soldiers mocking him, goading him, telling him to save himself and be the greatest. But Jesus has come *not* to save himself, and in God's way to *be* the greatest. He was numbered with the transgressors ... and the circle widens, and reaches back into the evening before, back into that upper room and there are more transgressors with Jesus in their midst—Simon Peter, and the other apostles. He was numbered with the transgressors ... and the circle widens and reaches out into the future, all the way to tonight, to this room, and here are more transgressors with Jesus in our midst. Jesus overcomes the evil in my life and in your life. He overcomes it by coming into the midst of it and dying. He lets the evil win and do its worst so that it can't do anything anymore, and he entrusts his spirit for a time into his Father's hands. And the Father honors his Son and raises him from the dead and Jesus overcomes the evil. It can't do any more damage; it did all that it could, and Jesus still won. And risen from the dead, Jesus has authority here tonight, to forgive your evil and mine, and to keep us in his care all the way to the day of his glory.

When you're in the middle of a wreck as it's happening, it's hard to see things coming. But sometimes God does help us see it—and I see my stupidity in how I am comparing myself with you and thinking that somehow, I'm greater than you are. Yes. Sometimes God helps us to see our arrogance, our pride, our thinking that we can even walk down the street without the mercy and strength that only Christ gives. It's hard to see it coming—but sometimes God makes that happen, and we praise him for it. And so, I invite you to ask God for that kind of honesty and humility, to ask God's mercy to see the folly coming, and to turn away from pride. And in doing that, Jesus alone will receive all of the glory.

But sometimes we go into that evil, don't we? We judge each other, we live as though we were the masters of our own fate, the lords of our days and our schedules and our wallets and our relationships. "I didn't mean to do that. But I did it anyway." When that happens, remember: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." And pray that God will take my folly and your pride and turn it into a sign, a huge, bright arrow that points us—away from ourselves, and points us to Jesus. He was numbered among the transgressors. He is here, among us for good. In Jesus, God meant it all for good. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SERMON 3: LENTEN MIDWEEK 2

“The Real Battle”

Luke 22:39–62

I happen to be a big fan of some stories from more than 100 years ago by a British author named Arthur Conan Doyle. All told, this series has fifty-six short stories and four novels, written between 1892 and 1927. If you don't know what I'm talking about yet, this might help: Sherlock Holmes. (If you still don't recognize the stories, that's OK—bear with me.) Holmes is the main figure in the series; he's a private detective in London and he is the master of logical thinking, careful reasoning based on evidence, solving crimes, and so on. I first read some of the Sherlock Holmes stories when I was a teenager, and he was my hero.

At one point in the series, Holmes reveals that behind a crime wave in London—blackmail, murder, and so on—behind it all is a single connection—or better, a single person: “Professor Moriarty” is his name. Everyone else involved in the crime wave is just a two-bit figure. Like a spider weaving a web, Professor Moriarty is the root cause and the guiding mind, and so Holmes is out to find and outwit and defeat his great enemy. The other people involved play their roles—but the real enemy is that one person. He's never visibly present at the scene of a crime—but he's behind it all.

Why do I bring this up tonight, when we are reading and pondering Jesus's agony in the garden, his arrest, and Peter's denial? Well, to answer that question, let me ask another one. How many people are key to these verses from Luke 24? One person comes to mind right away of course—the Lord Jesus. And others are there—twelve apostles, counting Judas, and some of the chief priests and the temple guard and a servant girl and a couple of others and several crowds of people. And they all play their part, so to speak. But Luke's Gospel reveals in a unique way that behind it all is one figure, one person if I can use that term. Satan. There's Jesus. And there is his great enemy, who isn't even named in the verses that we read tonight. But let me show you what I mean and let me also say that all these verses I'm going to mention are found in Luke's Gospel, and remarkably, only in Luke's Gospel.

Like Matthew and Mark, Luke tells us that early in his ministry the Lord Jesus was directly tempted by Satan. When that event is over, however, only Luke makes this direct statement: “And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Jesus until an opportune time.” Satan would be back.

Here's another one, and you might remember it from our Ash Wednesday reading. There Luke begins to tell the events of that Passover meal and the night when Jesus was going to be betrayed. First, he says that the chief priests and their allies were looking for a way to destroy Jesus. And then he writes, “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot ... and he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Jesus to them.” John's Gospel has a very similar statement. But Luke is making it clear that now the

moment for which Satan has been waiting—that opportune time—has come. Satan is behind the plan, the plot to arrest Jesus.

And then there is this, from last week’s reading, from verse 31: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you all, that he might sift you all like wheat.” Now, yes, next comes Jesus’s promise of Peter’s turning back again after it’s all said and done. But the fact remains—Satan is going to separate, sift, winnow, shake the apostles and see who is “wheat,” and who is “chaff,” blown away by the wind.

So, yes, in this reading tonight, there is Judas, and there are the chief priests and their allies. There’re the apostles. But Satan is directing, influencing, attacking all of them. He’s behind it all. And so, in a way, there are really only two figures, two “persons” who matter. Satan ... and Jesus.

And Jesus knows that. He *knows* it. He’s the one who warns the apostles in the garden that night, he warns them: “Pray.” “Pray,” he says. “Temptation is coming against you; the tempter is coming against you; Satan is coming against you. Pray so that you won’t enter into it. Because if you do, you won’t be able to stand. You’re not solid enough, you’re not strong enough; you’ll blow away like chaff.”

Jesus knows that Satan is behind it all, under it all. The chief priests and their group think that it’s their clever, secret plan that made it all work. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, and they bring force against him. It looks like it was all their plan, and that their plan worked.

But Jesus knows better. He says, “I used to be in the temple courtyards every day, and if you wanted to arrest me as if I were a robber, you could have done it then. But it’s happening now because this is your hour and even more ... this is the power of darkness.” The power of darkness—Satan’s power.

When the disciples ignore Jesus’s warning for them to pray, how do they fare when Satan attacks? They scatter like chaff. While Jesus is praying in an agony that none of us can come close to imagining ... the apostles fall asleep. And then one of the twelve betrays Jesus with a kiss, and Jesus has to undo the violence of another one. And then Peter—who promised that he was ready to go with Jesus to prison and to death, is following ... from a distance. And speaking through a servant girl and two others, Satan comes at Peter, and Satan sifts him, and Peter is undone. Jesus said it would happen. And on his way to stand before the Sanhedrin Jesus looks straight at Peter ... and Peter remembers. But Luke tells us that Peter only remembers the bad news. He didn’t remember that Jesus promised that Peter would turn again. And so, Peter is undone. He goes outside, and he weeps bitterly. Not until the first Easter morning will Peter be restored ... as Jesus promised he would be.

In a way, then, every other human figure in this reading gets thinner and thinner, less and less substantial, until they almost disappear. Yes, of course, the religious authorities still have Jesus under arrest—but the power behind their evil is the evil one. And so, this reading

shows Jesus and Satan, Jesus vs. Satan, Satan out to destroy Jesus. And if it doesn't sound too dramatic to say it, on one level—Satan will win. Satan will succeed. And here is the truly amazing thing about that—Jesus knows that, too, and he willingly accepts it.

While the apostles were sleeping, Jesus was praying and praying, in an agony that no one else has ever known. He knew what was coming, and despite the mystery of his agony and struggle, his prayer and his choice were clear: “Father, your will be done. Father, I will drink the cup.” This cup is full to the brim. It's full of God's response to evil and sin, it's full of God's rightful and righteous judgment, and it's a cup that is prepared for people who are guilty, and people who are evil. The Old Testament prophets spoke fairly often of this cup—it's for God's enemies to drink. But Jesus will drink it, though he's the only person ever to live who deserves not one drop from that cup.

The path toward drinking that cup runs through arrest and trial, unjust and unfair accusations, spitting and beating and suffering and death—all the while carrying on his shoulders the weight of evil and Satan's hatred and the cowardice and the failure of the disciples. That's enough to destroy anyone. It's enough to destroy everyone. And Satan and his allies, are out to destroy Jesus. And in a way they will succeed. The perfectly innocent Jesus will be numbered among the transgressors. And he will die, commending his spirit to the Father. The wages of sin is death. And Jesus will die.

Friends, this much is crystal clear: Satan hates God, and he hates Jesus. So, without a doubt we say that that night, Satan meant all of this for evil—evil against Judas, against the other apostles, against everyone. And Satan meant this for evil against Jesus. But here is the glory and here is the wonder, and here is the praise. God meant it for good. He meant it *all* for good. Pause with me over just one small piece of this reading, something that goes by so quickly that we might overlook it, we might miss what it means.

Verse 61: “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” Jesus is bound, he's arrested, he's on his way to death. But Luke still calls him, “The Lord.” And in the cramped quarters of ancient Jerusalem, there is Peter in the courtyard of the high priest's house and now they lead Jesus out of that house, and he can turn and see the man who has just denied that he even knows Jesus. And at that moment, Luke tells us, all that *Peter* can remember is the Lord's prediction that Peter would deny Jesus; that's what *Peter* remembers.

What Simon Peter doesn't remember yet is that Jesus has prayed for him. What Simon doesn't remember in that instant is that the time will come when Simon the traitor, the turncoat, will turn again, as Jesus said. Jesus said it, and Simon's faith will return, and he will strengthen the others who, like him, have been sifted like wheat. Simon doesn't seem to remember the promise. But Jesus does because he made the promise. Jesus knew that God meant all of this for good. For Simon's good. And for your good, and for mine.