

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Midweek Lenten Rotation
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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
God on Trial - Restraint

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd appeared, and the man called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He came near to Jesus to kiss him. ⁴⁸ But Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” ⁴⁹ When those who were around him saw what was about to happen, they said to him, “Lord, should we strike with a sword?” ⁵⁰ Then one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus responded, “Stop! No more of this!” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him. ⁵² Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as you would against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour—when darkness rules.” – Luke 22:47-53

This funeral service was different from many in its tone. At many Christian services, a somber joy prevails throughout the service. Yet this one did not feel this way. People filled the funeral hall, and they did not know what to do or say. The pastor agreed to do the funeral, but this wouldn’t be a Christian victory service. There was an air of uncertainty that hung over the room.

He was just 33 years old when they found him in the basement. Things in his life had seemed to get worse and worse. After his wife left him, he started to go to the bottle more and more. Although he was going to the pastor for help during these days, grief got the better of him one evening.

For some reason, the service was delayed. Then, the uproar in the parking lot gave a reason for the delay. This young man’s estranged wife came to the funeral home that day. Sobbing and screaming, everyone could tell that his mother had lost her restraint. She screamed about how this woman took her son’s life. She sobbed about her perceived selfish actions. The mother could not restrain her emotions and actions at this moment.

When emotions are charged, stakes are large, and grief is immense, we can understand a person’s inability to restrain herself. One would not look at this mother and wonder, “What’s wrong with her?” The expected response is a loss of restraint demonstrated through bursts of grief or fits of rage.

The night our Lord was betrayed was an emotionally charged evening. The disciples witnessed a close friend betray their Lord. Then, they saw the mob come to restrain him. Knowing this context and human nature, the reaction of Jesus’ disciples on this evening is not the shocking aspect of the passion narrative. The shocking aspect of this narrative is Jesus’ restraint. Jesus demonstrated restraint of his emotions and actions.

While in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed intensely and earnestly as he approached the difficulty of his passion. As Jesus prayed, sweat dropped down like drops of blood. We often consider that Jesus is truly God, so we perhaps lose sight of the fact that he is truly human in every way. Jesus was about to step forward into a grueling and difficult task.

His betrayer came by while Jesus was speaking to his disciples, who had yet again fallen asleep while he was in prayer. Judas, one of his twelve disciples—one of the closest people to Jesus—gave the signal of his betrayal by kissing Jesus on the cheek. I imagine that would have been a crushing feeling. Yet, restraining himself, Jesus said, “*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*”

Although Jesus was able to restrain himself in this moment, Jesus’ disciples, understandably so, were not. They responded by asking, “*Lord, should we strike with a sword?*” The disciples had a response that

seemed natural to us. Seeing a betrayal of this kind, they were ready to fight. The stakes were high. The emotions were charged.

One of the disciples, who goes unnamed by Luke but we know is Peter, takes his sword. Then, in his burst of anger, he cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. We also know that his name is Malchus. Again, this can be shocking to see at first, yet it makes sense. Men, would you not do this same thing? I am here to protect my people. Peter's lack of restraint seems so natural for the occasion.

Again, the shocking aspect of this is Jesus's restraint. Jesus clearly and firmly rebuked his disciples, saying, "*Stop! No more of this.*" Jesus let the disciples know that even though their lack of restraint was natural, it was wrong. Jesus was not going to lead an emotionally charged war against these people.

Then, Jesus, who demonstrated restraint of his emotions and actions, acted. Yet, his action isn't what one might expect. Jesus picked up Malchus' ear. Then, he healed this man. People might wonder about this one. Why would Jesus heal one of the people wrongly arresting him?

Yes, Jesus demonstrated restraint as the mob came to restrain him for an arrest. Yet, Jesus called them out for their wrongdoing. Why had they come out to arrest him with swords and clubs? Jesus wasn't a criminal. They knew it. They had seen Jesus many times. He had his opportunity to "get them." They should have known of Jesus' restraint.

This mobbed moved forward and arrested Jesus. They restrained him. They then moved forward to bring God on trial.

As Jesus was arrested, he demonstrated his restraint in shocking ways. Jesus waited for his arresters to come when he knew they would be there. Although it would have been an emotionally charged moment when Judas betrayed him, Jesus restrained himself. When Jesus' disciples failed to restrain their actions, Jesus rebuked them and healed the high priest's servant. Then, Jesus allowed this mob to restrain him so they could bring God on trial.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, how do you demonstrate restraint? Can you restrain your emotions and actions in situations of high stress? Imagine the situation I began with at a funeral. Could you restrain yourself? Or how about you meet an individual who hurt you in the past, could you restrain your tongue? What if you met an individual who hurt your loved ones, could you restrain yourself?

Many of us would struggle to restrain our words and actions amid emotional and stressful situations. Worse yet, I bet many of us would feel justified or dignified in such bursts of anger and "passion." People often have a mindset that they want to be someone who "tells it like it is" or "is a straight shooter." So, if someone demonstrates "unrestrained passion" or "unbridled anger," they can even be applauded by many. Do you demonstrate control over your emotions and actions during such scenarios?

Forget emotional scenarios; do you demonstrate restraint in your everyday life? The practice of fasting as a spiritual discipline has seemed to go the way of the dodo bird among American Christianity. American Christians would never dream of going without food for extended periods. So, why was fasting a practice for many ancient Christians? Let's not just blame it on legalism and work righteousness. Jesus and Paul fasted. Many ancient Christians saw fast as a practice ground for self-denial. They would learn to restrain their desires in the realm of food as a practice for the more emotional and difficult temptations that came their way.

It doesn't have to be through the practice of fasting, but do you have a healthy practice of self-denial and self-restraint in your everyday life? Can you restrain yourself from making that zinger that will get people to laugh at your co-worker? Can you restrain yourself from fulfilling your desires through the screen on your phone? Are you able to restrain yourself in the small scenarios of life?

If you can't restrain yourself during a mundane Monday, what makes you think you will restrain yourself when enormous emotions engulf you? I said that being a "straight shooter" may be a demonstration of a lack of restraint. Let me tell you straight right now: You won't!

Many of us have failed to train ourselves to exercise restraint of our desires, emotions, and actions in our daily lives. Therefore, we have put ourselves in situations where we fail to demonstrate restraint when our blood pressure rises. Married couples, when the discussion becomes an argument, do you restrain your tongue? Athletes, do you restrain your reactions when the physical play becomes cheap shots? Employees, when the customer becomes obscene, do you restrain your words?

Peter was unable to restrain his actions during a stressful time. Many of us, too, fail to restrain ourselves. This may seem normal, perhaps because we have normalized sin. God's Word is very clear about our need to exercise self-restraint in all situations. One such passage is "A person who lacks self-control is like a broken-down city without a wall." (Proverbs 25:28). If we fail to restrain ourselves in any situation, we then out to do something else that begins with an R and an E. This is that we are to repent. Living an unrestrained life will lead to nothing but being restrained in the shackles of sin and being carried off to the prison of hell.

In repentance and faith, look to Jesus. As this mob restrained Jesus, he demonstrated ultimate restraint. Jesus' restraint at this moment was him living the perfect life that you could not live. He faced the emotional stress that you face and overcame it. It was also Jesus' denying his comfort to head to the cross. Jesus had to be restrained and arrested that night. Jesus had to be betrayed. All of this happened because of the wonderful purpose of God's will. In eternity, God foreordained that he would save you in what he would do in Christ Jesus here. After being arrested, Jesus would be taken off to the cross. Then, he would die for our sins. His blood was shed to wash us clean. In Jesus, we are forgiven. We are forgiven for failing to restrain ourselves. You are washed in the blood of Jesus who was restrained for you for nails restrained him to a cross.

Moved by the grace of our God with his Spirit working in us, let us demonstrate restraint in our lives—practice self-restraint in the mundanity of everyday life. Deny your desires. Deny your wants. Instead, look to serve the Lord your God even when that isn't what you desire. Let these be moments to prepare you to be restrained in emotional and stressful times. You are doing this so that you can honor the Jesus who was restrained for you.

If someone was unrestrained in their emotions and actions during a funeral, we might expect such a visceral reaction, but God has called us to be restrained. When we fail to restrain ourselves, this is a sin. Yet, Jesus was restrained for us. He exercised self-restraint in our place. Then, he was restrained by a mob that arrested him who then restrained him to the cross. Jesus' restraint means forgiveness and life for you and me. Amen.