

On Trial in Our Place: Restraint

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

⁴⁹ When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” ⁵⁰ And one of them (Peter) struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

Are any of us surprised that the disciples said what they said and Peter did what he did? Are any of us surprised that the disciples were ready to fight the mob that came to arrest Jesus? Are any of us really surprised that Peter was the first to draw his sword and actually cut off someone’s ear? We aren’t. Why? Because we can see ourselves doing the same. We can see ourselves quickly coming to the defense of those we love. And that’s not always a bad thing.

But in this case, in the Garden of Gethsemane, we’re talking a large company of people (two of the Gospel writers use the word “crowd”), including soldiers, that came to arrest Jesus, and they came with swords and clubs. What did the disciples and Peter really think they were going to accomplish fighting these guys? Not to mention, had they forgotten, again, who Jesus was and what he could do?

The Son of God, who raised the dead and healed many diseases, had plenty of options. With one word, Jesus could have called down more than twelve legions of angels if he wanted to (that’s 72,000 angels, by the way) and with another word, he could have gotten rid of them forever if he wanted to. With just three words, look at what happened there in that garden: **Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I AM HE,” Jesus said. When Jesus said, “I AM HE,” they drew back and fell to the ground** (John 18:5-6). But Jesus didn’t use his power to dispose of the enemy. Instead, Jesus showed restraint – perfect, holy restraint – and selflessly surrendered himself to the enemy. Do you know why? FOR US.

Restraint is the ability to hold back. It’s a characteristic of self-control, and it’s not easy – especially in situations when you feel you are wronged or going to be wronged. How do you respond to unwarranted criticism? What’s your first reaction when someone accuses you of doing something

you didn't do? What's your first reaction when you feel people are out to harm or hurt you? It's often not restraint. Why? Because the tendency is to think of ourselves first, and when we feel like we are on trial or being threatened, our first inclination is to defend ourselves. Again, that doesn't always have to be wrong. But how often is it a pride thing? How often is it a revenge thing? How often is it an "oh yeah, I'll show you" thing? How often is it a "how dare you!" thing? And maybe we don't literally pull out a sword to cut off someone's ear, but we lash out with our tongues. Or we fire an angry text or email or leave a bitter screed in the comments box. Or just in our evil, wicked thoughts we wish ill-will on someone.

What does Jesus say about this? He says what he said to the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane: **"NO MORE OF THIS!"** And then look at what Jesus does: **"He touched the man's ear and healed him."** Jesus had said, **"Love your enemies,"** and now he was showing his disciples – showing us – what that looks like. But it was far more than that. The path to our salvation began with Jesus' surrender to this unholy mob in the garden. He stood in that garden as the perfect Lamb of God, the SERVANT who never opened his mouth or drew a sword to harm anyone, but gave himself over willingly as our Savior from sin. We need this Savior. We need his quiet and purposeful obedience to his Father's will, his perfection, his holiness, his righteousness for us to be able to stand before our Father in heaven, and we need his willingness and his heart to say, as he did being nailed to the cross, **"Father, forgive them"** (Luke 23:24). Such gracious restraint! And all for our salvation! That cannot be overstated: All for our salvation!

It also cannot be overstated that everything Jesus did for us is ours through faith. His righteousness is ours through faith, and the forgiveness of sins is ours through faith. The word "vicarious" is an all-important word to remember during this season of Lent. "Vicarious" means to do things in our place for our benefit.

But dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we also need Jesus' example. We live in a world where the quick comeback, the biting response, and the demeaning answer are rewarded both in real life and social media. Talk shows and news channels thrive on inflammatory reports to gain more views and secure a loyal audience. Social media algorithms literally target our sense of indignation to get us to engage. When we live in a world like this, it can rub off on us. We can think that if we don't respond with the same level of venom, we are weak and cowardly.

But what if we acted and responded differently? Imagine the impact we could have in this overcharged world where restraint is a lost virtue.

You know the one who showed love and restraint all the way to his sacrificial death on the cross for you. You know Jesus who is in control of all things, working everything out for the good of his people. This means you can be different. You, we, all of us at Christ Our Redeemer can use our words to heal and help instead of to inflame and destroy. All of us can think of the hurt others feel rather than the hurt they have caused us. All of us can respond graciously and not impulsively when we are provoked by those around us.

Yes, it takes strength to do this. BUT I WILL REMIND YOU AGAIN WHERE YOU FIND THIS STRENGTH: You find it in Jesus, who walked the path to Calvary before you. The world would say that Jesus had every right to fight back in the garden. But he set aside justice for himself out of love for you. It is this love that gives you the strength you need to show restraint.

When you are wronged, remember that you operate from a position of strength:

- God has declared you righteous and forgiven; you don't have to prove anything.
- His plan will prevail; you don't have to be in control.
- His Spirit fills you; you don't stand alone.

Be a light in this world, and maybe through your loving restraint, others might notice and give you an opportunity to share Jesus' love with them.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Amen. (Colossians 3:15)

This sermon has been adapted by Pastor Dan from a Lenten sermon series called "God on Trial" purchased from Northwestern Publishing House