

Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, May 10, 2009

Face to Face: Filthy Language & Longsuffering “When Lack of Evidence Is Enough”

Mark 14:53-65

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Lack of evidence can lead to conviction. Ray Krone was walking a free man in the bright Arizona sun on the afternoon of Monday, April 8, 2002. That was remarkable because that morning, as every morning for the previous 10-1/2 years, he'd awakened in a prison cell after being convicted twice of 36-year-old Kim Ancona's December 1991 murder in a Phoenix lounge.¹

Ray's conviction in 1992 was based on “expert” testimony. After spending four years on Arizona's death row, Ray's conviction was thrown out by the Arizona Supreme Court.

Although DNA tests introduced at his second trial proved that blood found on Ms. Ancona didn't belong to either her or Ray, he was again convicted on the basis of “expert” testimony.

After his second conviction in 1996, Ray told *The Arizona Republic* he was innocent. “I was not there that night. [This] pretty much rules out any faith I have in truth and justice.” The trial judge, Maricopa County Superior Court Judge James McDougall, expressed doubt about the outcome of the trial when he wrote, “The court is left with a residual or lingering doubt about the clear identity of the killer.” After sentencing Ray to life in prison, Judge McDougall wrote, “This is one of those cases that will haunt me for the rest of my life, wondering whether I have done the right thing.”

Proclaiming his innocence since the time he first came under suspicion, DNA test results were obtained again on April 4th. Ray's lawyer, Alan Simpson, said: “This proves with certainty that Ray Krone is an innocent man. Four days later Ray was a free man.

Language is so important. Without words, we cannot communicate. Words are powerful. We can use them to bless or curse.

¹“Death is Different,” Editorial Staff, *The New York Times*, April 10, 2002.

This month, we conclude our year-long study in Mark and Colossians 3:8-15 on the theme "Face to Face. Come Closer. Be Changed." From the pulpit, I will examine the pairings of the words "filthy language" and "patience."

A simple definition for "filthy language" is any words that are or can be perceived as abusive. A simple definition for "patience" is longsuffering or perseverance.

Remember that even though Jesus is God, he is also a man. Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine. He knew the injustice that was soon to occur. He knew the pain he would be required to endure. Yet, Jesus was passive. No confrontation. No conflict. No filthy language; just patience.

Mark Driscoll, a pastor at Mars Hill Church in Seattle, supports the use of provocative, sarcastic and earthy speech. Though he denounces "shock-jock language" as inappropriate, Driscoll repeatedly has shown that he doesn't shy away from saying things that many would consider crude and irreverent.

The Bible does have examples of strong language. Take the opening of Galatians where Paul tells a bunch of guys who are into circumcision to go all the way and emasculate themselves.² Or Ezekiel telling the Israelites that they are whoring after certain people and gods because of the size of their genitalia is very strong language.³

I remember one time as a child that my mother actually washed my mouth out with soap. She took me to the bathroom sink, rubbed the bar of soap around in my mouth and then rinsed it out and made me go to my room. Do you know what I had said? I think I had said, "Shut up!" to my sister.

Now why should my mother wash my mouth out with soap for saying, "Shut up!" to my sister? She did it because she believed Jesus when he said, "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'"⁴

I had made myself dirty by saying, "Shut up," to my sister, and my mother had a white-hot zeal for my purity. So she used an unforgettable object lesson. "But really!" someone will say.

"What's the big deal with saying, 'Shut up,' to your sister? It's not swearing. It's not taking the name of the Lord in vain. It's not a dirty word." When I said, "Shut up!" to my sister, it was mean. There was no affection, good will or kindness in it. There was no moral beauty, holiness or love. It came from pride, one-upmanship, anger and

²Galatians 1:6-10

³Ezekiel 23:20

⁴Matthew 15:11

resentment.

Jesus was led to the high priest's home where the leading priests, other leaders and teachers of religious law had gathered. According to the laws established in the Mishna (the Jewish book of procedural law) there are a number of illegalities that occurred in Jesus' trial. Trials were not to be held at night. Trials were not to be held during festivals. This trial was occurring during Passover. At trials, the accused was to have legal counsel and capital verdicts could not be reached in one day.

A miscarriage of justice can occur, especially when powerful men are bent on making it happen. We see examples of it all the time. A few years ago, the New York City public school system ruled that a student couldn't display a Nativity scene in a "winter holiday" exhibit, even though the same exhibit displayed Hanukkah menorahs and the Islam star and crescent. The student's mother sued the school system, and federal judge Charles Sifton upheld the school's ruling. He said Jewish and Islam symbols were permissible, but Christian symbols were not. In his ruling he condescendingly referred to the child as a "hyper-sensitive Catholic."⁵ The ruling was blatantly unjust.

Words make a difference. Testimony matters. Evidence can lead to conviction. The leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find witnesses who would testify against Jesus, so they could put him to death. Many false witnesses spoke against Jesus, but they contradicted each other. Finally, some men stood up to testify against him with this lie: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.'"

The witnesses twisted something Jesus had said earlier to mean something that he didn't intend it to mean. In the book of John, we read where the Jewish leaders confronted him.

"Then the Jews demanded of Jesus, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?'" But by "this temple," Jesus meant his body.⁶ Jesus was speaking symbolically, but they used his words to trap him.

Then the high priest stood up before the others and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer?" Jesus made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am,

⁵The Associated Press, December 11, 2002.

⁶John 2:18-21

and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."⁷

Jesus quoted Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1. Both verses are Messianic prophecies. Jesus made it clear that he was, in fact, the Christ.

In the end, the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need any more witnesses? You have all heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"⁸ If what Jesus said wasn't true, then he would be guilty of blasphemy. Blasphemy was a punishable offense.⁹ Jesus' words were outrageous, if they weren't true. This is why we can't pass Jesus off as merely a good moral teacher. A man who is merely a good moral teacher doesn't claim to have ultimate authority over heaven and earth.

And they condemned Jesus to death. Then some of them began to spit at him. They blindfolded him and hit his face with their fists. I'm sure it seemed odd to the leaders and guards that Jesus claimed to have divine authority and yet he was so easily captured. He claimed to be a king and yet his followers all deserted him at his arrest. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and yet he stood before them, looking like nothing more than a Galilean peasant.

The ruling in New York was not a blanket condemnation of New Yorkers, their public school system or of federal judges. A very small group of people made a bad decision and implemented an unfair policy. In Jesus' case, the Sanhedrin abused their power for their own personal gain. Eduard Schweizer writes, "Whoever is conscious of his own negligence in obedience, of his own failure to love, of the lethargy of his own heart in the midst of the demands of everyday life, cannot escape from his responsibility before God for Jesus' death by fixing the blame upon some other person."¹⁰

Words are powerful. Filthy language is abusive. Lack of evidence can lead to conviction. Many will never be wrongly convicted. Only a few will suffer that fate. But, what about the lack of evidence that we as followers of Jesus demonstrate? Should not that be convicting? Recall this morning's Prayer of Confession:

Heavenly Father, as we draw near to the close of this school year and claim the year ahead, our Father, we confess to you those pieces of our past that persist in pulling us backward. With boldness, and a measure of embarrassment, we admit to squandering time and talent, good intentions and better ideas, opportunities for growth and occasions for grace. We admit that we have often taken care of ourselves while others have stood in line. We have defined our interests carefully and our goals precisely, using energy and expertise to our own benefit, but sometimes to the detriment of family, friends, community, and church. We agonize with memories that sit heavily and images that cause us to blush, and ask that you would grant us your forgiveness. As we focus this morning on staffing children's ministries for the fall, we are mindful of the

⁷Mark 14:59-62

⁸Mark 14:63-64

⁹Leviticus 24:16

¹⁰Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1970).

promise we make during baptisms - to teach the children so that they will become your disciples; forgive us, Lord, when as a church we make the vows but then hold back from serving in Sunday School or on Wednesday evenings. In your great mercy forgive our sins and free us from selfishness, that we may choose your will and obey your commandments; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

We always have the need for teachers in our Sunday School and EDGE ministries. According to George Barna, what most children believe about God and being a follower of Jesus is determined by the age of twelve. If you want information on how you can serve as a teacher or classroom aide, simply put your name and phone number on a blue offering envelope and drop it in the offering plate. Hear me. You are not officially signing up to serve. You are asking to receive more information.

Do non-believers see the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Name a person you have introduced to Jesus Christ. Worship, education, faith sharing and service must be consistently evident in our lives as followers of Jesus. Evidence validates or convicts.

Face to face with Jesus. Come closer. Be changed. Lack of evidence can lead to conviction. Let us pray!

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