

# THE WEAK SAVIOR

Matthew 26:1-27:66

Sunday of the Passion (Series A)

April 2, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*. It is all of chapters 26 and 27. This is a very long reading, and you will probably be able to focus better if you are seated. This is the account of Jesus' passion. Try to imagine the scenes in your mind as you listen to what your Lord did for you. From Matthew 26, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>26:1</sup> When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, <sup>2</sup>“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

<sup>3</sup> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, <sup>4</sup> and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. <sup>5</sup> But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

<sup>6</sup> Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. <sup>8</sup> And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? <sup>9</sup> For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” <sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>11</sup> For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup> In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. <sup>13</sup> Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

<sup>14</sup> Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup> And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

<sup>17</sup> Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” <sup>18</sup> He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’ ” <sup>19</sup> And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

<sup>20</sup> When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. <sup>21</sup> And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” <sup>22</sup> And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” <sup>23</sup> He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup> The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” <sup>25</sup> Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

<sup>26</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” <sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

<sup>30</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. <sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ <sup>32</sup> But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” <sup>33</sup> Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” <sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” <sup>37</sup> And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” <sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” <sup>40</sup> And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? <sup>41</sup> Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” <sup>42</sup> Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” <sup>43</sup> And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup> So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. <sup>45</sup> Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup> Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. <sup>48</sup> Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” <sup>49</sup> And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. <sup>51</sup> And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. <sup>53</sup> Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? <sup>54</sup> But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” <sup>55</sup> At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. <sup>56</sup> But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.

<sup>57</sup> Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. <sup>58</sup> And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. <sup>59</sup> Now

the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, <sup>60</sup> but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward <sup>61</sup> and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.' " <sup>62</sup> And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" <sup>63</sup> But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." <sup>64</sup> Jesus said to him, "**You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.**" <sup>65</sup> Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. <sup>66</sup> What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." <sup>67</sup> Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, <sup>68</sup> saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

<sup>69</sup> Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." <sup>70</sup> But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." <sup>71</sup> And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

<sup>72</sup> And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." <sup>73</sup> After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." <sup>74</sup> Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. <sup>75</sup> And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

<sup>27:1</sup> When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. <sup>2</sup> And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

<sup>3</sup> Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, <sup>4</sup> saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

<sup>5</sup> And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. <sup>6</sup> But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." <sup>7</sup> So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. <sup>8</sup> Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. <sup>9</sup> Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, <sup>10</sup> and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

<sup>11</sup> Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "**You have said so.**" <sup>12</sup> But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" <sup>14</sup> But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

<sup>15</sup> Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup> And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

<sup>17</sup> So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” <sup>18</sup> For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. <sup>19</sup> Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.” <sup>20</sup> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” <sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” <sup>23</sup> And he said, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

<sup>24</sup> So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” <sup>25</sup> And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” <sup>26</sup> Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. <sup>28</sup> And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” <sup>30</sup> And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. <sup>31</sup> And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup> As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), <sup>34</sup> they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. <sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. <sup>36</sup> Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. <sup>37</sup> And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” <sup>38</sup> Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. <sup>39</sup> And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” <sup>41</sup> So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, <sup>42</sup> “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ”

<sup>44</sup> And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

<sup>45</sup> Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

<sup>46</sup> And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” <sup>47</sup> And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” <sup>48</sup> And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. <sup>49</sup> But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

<sup>50</sup> And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

<sup>51</sup> And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, <sup>53</sup> and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup> When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

<sup>55</sup> There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, <sup>56</sup> among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

<sup>57</sup> When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup> And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud <sup>60</sup> and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

<sup>62</sup> The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup> and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ <sup>64</sup> Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” <sup>66</sup> So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*  
Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Everyone likes a good hero story. We like the good guy versus bad guy stories where the good guy wins. We like the virtuous hero who cares more about protecting other people than he does about saving himself. We admire the hero who risks his life without thinking twice. I’ll admit to you, though, that I find many hero stories to be rather boring, because the heroes are just too perfect. I get bored when there’s no weakness in them. When the odds are stacked against them, but they’re not even a little bit afraid to die, I find it to be very unrealistic, like the characters aren’t really human. It’s boring when you know that there’s no struggle within a person; the good guy is going to do what he’s supposed to do without a second thought. The problem is that it’s just too easy for the hero. He doesn’t actually have to suffer, because he’s just too awesome. And then, at the end, you know there will be a fight with some really tough bad guy, but the good guy’s going to win, because that’s how it always goes. It’s boring, unrealistic, and unhuman.

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In the great stories of the Bible, there’s something different that catches our attention almost every time we read them. This story of Jesus’ betrayal and crucifixion is no different. And I should clarify that this is not just a story. This is history. What we just read, and what we’re meditating on now is the eyewitness testimony of those who knew Jesus and saw what happened to him. There are many different themes we might notice. We might notice everything that identifies Jesus as a king. We might notice the various different prophecies and Old Testament references. This time, the weakness caught my attention. These are the things that we might be

afraid to give much thought to. They're the things that are too human and, therefore, not God-like enough. The Bible sometimes has things that we don't really want to pay much attention to. There are teachings or events that scare us off. We think, *I don't really want that kind of God*, so we skip over them. But if we give in to those things and follow them wherever they might lead us, we find something greater than we could have ever imagined. So I'm going to invite you to give in to the weakness of Jesus.

There are three weak moments that stand out to me in Jesus' passion. There are probably more, but these three stood out to me. The first one is Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before he was arrested. He prayed, **"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will"** (26:39). Jesus did not want to die. And he did not just pray this once and then go resolutely to the cross. He prayed long enough for his disciples to fall asleep. Then he woke them up. Then he prayed some more. Then he had to wake them up again. And he prayed a third time until he had to wake them up again. Jesus spent a long time praying this prayer. Jesus struggled with this. He did not want to die, so he prayed to his Father that if there were any other way, he could avoid the cross. It might surprise us, because, for quite some time, Jesus had known that he must suffer and die for the sins of the world. As far back as chapter 16, Jesus was teaching his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and be killed (16:21). They tried to talk him out of it, but Jesus was resolute. But now, the night before it all goes down, Jesus is asking his Father if this is really the way it has to go. If it is, he'll do it, but he knows that it's going to be very painful. It's going to be lonely and dark. It's going to be humiliating and ugly. It's going to be the kind of pain that crushes both body and soul to the extent that you don't know where one ends and the other begins. Jesus did not want to go through this. In the end, he did, and he did it willingly, but we see his weakness in the garden.

The second moment of weakness is when they compel someone else to carry Jesus' cross. That guy's name was Simon, and he was from the city of Cyrene. None of the gospels say exactly why they made Simon carry it, but it's not too hard to figure out. Jesus was too weak. Part of it is that he had been up all night. Another part is that he had been beaten (27:26). But in the boring hero stories, the hero always manages to find the strength to do what must be done. He might be hurt, but from his great resolve, he musters just enough strength to complete his task. Jesus couldn't. He was too weak. Someone else had to carry his cross.

The third weak moment is the actual moment of Jesus' death. And I don't simply mean that he died; that was going to happen. That's what was supposed to happen. But, as far as crucifixions go, it was a quick death. Jesus didn't hang on as long as others did. He died before the criminals beside him. Crucifixion was a method of execution that could take several days. It was designed to be grueling and humiliating. But on that particular day, since it was the day before the Sabbath, the Jews did not want Jesus or the criminals to remain on their crosses after sundown, so they asked Pilate to have their legs broken (John 19:31). This would greatly accelerate their deaths. They did this with the two criminals, but Jesus was already dead (John 19:33). This process of execution that would often take a day or two, took only a few hours for Jesus. Based on the length of time darkness covered the whole land, it seems that it took only three hours (27:45). Even Pilate, who oversaw the whole thing and knew everything that was done to Jesus, was surprised to learn that Jesus had died so quickly (Mark 15:44). He was weak. He suffered what he had to, and he gave up the ghost (27:50).

I noticed these moments of weakness a long, long time ago. Perhaps you have noticed them before too. But I didn't want to give much thought to them. We don't really like the idea of a weak Savior. We might not want a God who dies easier than ordinary men, who can't carry his

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own cross, and who asks for a way out. But if Jesus doesn't struggle with all of this, then what is he really suffering? If he handles it like a superhero, with perfect resolve and unlimited strength, then what price is he really paying?

He suffered as he did because the whole weight of the wrath of God was on him. I suppose that, since Jesus is God, he had the ability to shield himself from the pain. But he didn't, neither the physical, not the spiritual pain. He endured it. When he asked his Father if there was any other way, it wasn't really the physical pain that he dreaded. It was the weight of all the sin of the world and the wrath of God that is justly poured out on that sin. He was weak, so weak, because he did not shield himself from the suffering. He gave himself into it. And that, really, is his strength to save us. He could have used his divine power to shield the pain, overcome the weakness, or even come down off the cross. In love, he set aside his divine power, and he gave himself over to weakness, suffering, shame, pain, and death. That is how he loved you. He suffered all of this in your place so you do not have to. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.