"The Look on Your Face"
Sermon for 12 June 2016
Texts: John 4; Zechariah 9:1-10

The video of a caged lion charging a little boy who was visiting a Japanese zoo and only being stopped by the protective glass between reminded me of several things. It reminded me of the verse: **Be sober-minded and alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.** 1 Peter 6:8 And it reminded me of what it feels like to look in the face of a stubbornly defiant and angry sinner. I thank God for the glass wall of grace that stands between me and that person. It is very clear that something is there which would like to get at me—to kill, destroy and devour. Satan dons the face of the sinner and glares balefully at me. And if I were so careless as to enter that enclosure, or so foolish as to turn my back on the devil, he would attack, assault and try to devour me. The Trump supporter in San Jose experienced some of this when she was pulled to safety, behind tall glass walls, having been taunted, threatened and egged by the angry mob of Trump haters at a campaign event. However, for the Christian the lesson is clear: when sinners are trying to harm you (either injure, or abuse you) it is best to take refuge in the Lord as your strong tower and keep the wall of grace betwixt and between.

However, this lion in the zoo metaphor can serve as a selfie. When we are in captivity to sin, we become the dangerous beast, the lion in the pit. And if we are to escape that condition, Jesus must go into the pit for us! There are implications here for both dealing with sin in our lives and for dealing with the sinners in our lives. Sin is indeed dangerous and we, under the influence of sin, become even more dangerous than a raging lion. The devouring power of depravity is like a hungry lion.

Instead of an urban zoo, the setting for this sermon is Jacob's well at Sychar in New Testament Samaria. Jesus has come here for a divine appointment with a particular woman. She is a notorious and oblivious sinner. This only goes to establish her as someone very like ourselves. From last Sunday, I would remind you, we are aware that what God is up to (building a kingdom for His Son and preparing a Bride for Jesus) is ultimate reality—these parallel objectives, commonly intertwined, shape God's work, or express His reality in life as lived. God is manifest in history. Events are breaking in His direction, both serving and advancing His purposes and His goals.

Zechariah 9 also exemplifies these things. **The burden of the word of the Lord against the land of Hadrach . . . Damascus** included. . .**and against Hamath which borders it, and against Tyre and Sidon** prophecies destruction. **Behold, the Lord will cast her out, He will destroy her power by sea, and she** (the seemingly impregnable island fortress) **will be destroyed by fire.** This divine intervention is observable: **For the eyes of men And all the tribes of Israel <u>are on the Lord</u>.** The crime that God is judging is the oppression of God's people. **For now I have seen with My eyes.** (v.8) God declares that He has "seen" the oppression and has come to contend with the

enemies of His people, to contend for them. *Therefore,* **Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, a foal of a donkey.** (v.9) This prophecy in Zechariah was fulfilled. Therefore it had implications for a past time. However, the same revelation pointed ahead to the time of Jesus, proclaiming another deliverance from oppression. We recognize the messianic vocabulary as that of Jesus' triumphal entry—the nomenclature of **the coming King . . . He is just and having salvation . . . riding on a donkey.** When Jesus replicated these signs, in the historical moment of His entrance into Jerusalem, the precedent was already set . . . everyone would know the declarations implied. I am the king, I am just, I bring salvation . . . I am delivering God's people from oppression . . . and **I am meek and humble in heart** (Matt. 11:29) but I am not ineffectual, or weak . . . rather I am strong to deliver and I am here to contend for you.

Jesus could not have made a more humble, or pointed entrance to Sychar. And He had come to contend with the Devil, or Satan, for the soul of this sin oppressed and injured woman. He has walked into the lion's enclosure to do battle for her. Sin is the adversary, Satan is our Enemy and Jesus comes to wage war for us against both sin and Satan. For us, that is great news. That is the encouragement we need to hear. It is one thing to know that God is building a kingdom and that God is preparing a bride for His Son but it is quite another to hear that we are the battle ground, we are the bride—that we are worth fighting for and that we are the prize (even **the joy that was set before Him! (**Heb. 12:2**)**). Not only is He on foot walking, He is wearied and **A woman of Samaria came to draw water.** (John 4:7) and He says to her, **Give me a drink!** The disciples are gone away **into the city to buy food.** (v.8)—suggesting perhaps that they left Perea, southeast Judea, in some haste. This scenario is very odd. The conditions are reminiscent, in some ways, of Jesus' battle with Satan during His forty days in the wilderness. Just Jesus and her whom no Jew would speak to, especially in public, *and she is a contemptuous Samaritan!* His disciples safely out of the way, Jesus engages a notorious sinner, spiritual captive and sex slave—someone oppressed by Satan and deep in sin. For her spiritual condition, see Ephesians 2:1-3 ESV:

> **And you were <u>dead</u> in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, <u>following the prince of the power of the air</u>, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body[a-*flesh*] and the mind, and were <u>by nature children of wrath</u>, like the rest of mankind.[b-*the rest*]**

Dead, in the thrall of Satan and a child of wrath . . . all three leap out at us. We also know that we, as sinners, **were enemies of God** (Romans 5:10), **hostile to God . . .un-submissive. . . unable to please God** (Romans 8:6). The passage makes explicit the fact that Jesus knows His enemies, both human and supernatural.

There is a very curious word used by the disciples upon their return, and discovery of the two in conversation. *Zeteis* translated here "talking" can be taken many ways: talking, discoursing, inquiring, or contending and this last meaning is salient here. The discourse of John 4 covers living water (as opposed to plain drinking water); adultery (**I have no husband** versus **you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband);** the appropriate place for worship (on Mt. Gerezin or in Jerusalem) as well as the nature of true worship. However, it is the infusion of truth (the living water and confrontation of her sin) that leads her to the confession of the Messiah's coming (**When He comes, He will tell us all things.**) Then **Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."** (vv.25-26) She believes and with belief comes deliverance and Satan's overthrow—Satan is no longer the prince of power in her life. All this and she doesn't even know His name (Jesus) *she is saved by knowing Who He is*—as are we all.

If we are to escape our sin condition, Jesus must go into the pit for us!

Note that Jesus, **the just** who **brings salvation**, operated out of lowliness (He was humble and meek) while defeating the enemies of God. He did not judge, or condemn the adulterous woman. And while there are many provocations that she uttered (her lifestyle was an offense, her sexual sin and her sarcastic, cutting speech), Jesus did not call down fire from heaven. He did not avenge His Father's injuries (her rebellion, lack of submission, self-harm, hostility and self-pleasing choices) and rather fed His enemy (He gave her drink!). Jesus's religion is to be *supernatural and pure* (which is why God urges us to protect ourselves, expose sin and refuse to take revenge!).

We should be awed by Jesus' example. His willingness to risk and determination are inspiring—do not ever give up on each other. If you are tempted to think that those who hurt, injure, neglect or abuse you deserve to be hated *remember that it is better to obey God* than it is to hate or punish. Rather pity them!

It is possible to linger too long on those who have wronged you. And you may grow angry, bitter and resentful. Take care. God has not so wronged you that you should wrong God by disobedience. Remember this and it will quiet your spirit. Deliberately turn your thoughts to better things. Remember and thank God for those who have helped, blessed and treated you fairly. Spend your weekends with those friends. The wicked break the peace . . . the righteous pen thank you's and return favors. Conquer your past with compassion. Find the freedom of forgiveness and be free.

Imitate the meekness of Jesus in the face of ridicule and mockery. He is quietly victorious at every turn.Your wounded heart might want to strike back even infidels do that. When Jesus was reviled, He reviled not back (1 Peter 2:23). If people speak evil of you, bless them in return. If you are persecuted, suffer gladly for Christ's sake. If you are defamed, respond with praise and kindness. **We are to do what others cannot**

do—live Christlike, rise above circumstances, a difficult past, move beyond the pain. Many by so doing have established peace in their own souls.

Consider the character of those you interact with. She is either “good” or “wicked.” If she is good, then love, light and tenderness will prevail and, after Christ has forgiven her, she will make amends, reparation—even reconciliation may be possible! All that will be easier if the way is paved with grace. Our Heavenly Father was more injured by this woman’s self-defacing, God-dishonoring sin, than either she, or any of her five former husbands ever were. And if the person who injured you is wicked, and does not repent, you may be sure that an entire, just and interminable punishment will be assessed to him.

If it helps, remember how deluded and miserable you were in your prior condition of lostness— slave to sin and enemy of God—and extend mercy to those whom you can. This does not include putting yourself or loved ones at further risk. Forgiveness may be given, trust is earned.

I have just suggested six positive responses to those who have injured, hurt, or disappointed us. But the supreme challenge *in what we suffer* is to obtain spiritual benefit from what others may have intended for evil. This is possible because our God is great and good—He is building a kingdom and preparing us to be His pure and spotless Bride!

We do not, dare not live according to the intentions of others. We are determined to overcome evil with good and hatred with love *because <u>that</u> is the plan.* Christ has overcome the world and through us He reigns on earth. We can thank God when we are counted worthy to be hated by the world. We can thank God that the behavior and actions of others causes us to review our own hearts . . . enabling us to be wiser, more circumspect, more patient and more forbearing. If I, through divine providence, make spiritual progress through my trials and sorrows (if my happiness, well-being, character, goodness and sanctity are enhanced), I should return good for evil . . . I should not have a hard thought . . . Why even bother with resentment? Am I willing, no matter what, to bring glory and honor to my sovereign Lord and wonderful Savior? And whatever is done to me, Jesus can turn it all to good.

The Samaritan woman was turned. Many hearts were gained.

Oh, yes, **we are to do what others can not do.**

Amen.