

“Murderous Eyes”

Mark 14:1-2, 53-65

Have you heard the phrase, “If looks could kill?” Thinking of that phrase, can you picture eyes filled with rage? Likely you’ve seen it in the eyes of another; perhaps you’ve seen it on your own face through an ill-timed glance in the mirror. In the ancient world and still today in some cultures, the “evil eye” is a glance that is thought to cause harm to the recipient. That’s how I envision the eyes of the chief priests and scribes, the Sadducees and Pharisees, as they plotted Jesus’ death in tonight’s Gospel Reading. They were filled with hatred and murder as they gazed upon Jesus being greeted with praise in Jerusalem during Holy Week, and before that, when face-to-face with Jesus, they heard Him speak woes and reproaches to them. If they could have shot arrows from their eyes at the Lord, they would have.

I don’t remember what I did to deserve it, but I recall my reaction to the punishment. My dad had chastised me and sent me to my room. I vividly remember going into my room, slamming the door, and behind closed doors muttering something like, “This is stupid! I hate this!” – out of earshot of my dad, of course. I’m sure my eyes had that murderous look the Jews had. But I knew in my heart that I had gotten what was coming for my misdeed and needed to be sorry and change my ways.

In Matthew, Jesus said, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”* He no doubt said this with a rather stern, fatherly look. This rhetoric wouldn’t fit in with Dale Carnegie’s advice given

in his 1936 bestseller How to Win Friends and Influence People – “Don’t criticize, don’t condemn, don’t complain.” But it was what they needed to hear, so those words were spoken in love, just as my father had done in disciplining me. God and His representatives never speak the Law to us in hatred, but only because we need to recognize our sin and know what to repent of.

Jesus wanted them to recognize their blatant hypocrisy and to repent. Jesus wants to bring them face-to-face with the murder that lay in their hearts. The pharisees and scribes were trying to find a way to “*arrest him by stealth and kill him.*” This is what the people of God have done to all of God’s prophets throughout scripture. Multigenerational guilt is real when the sons of the fathers lack repentance, so Jesus challenges them to push things forward to their logical conclusion by convicting them by saying, “I know your hearts! I can see the murder in your eyes! Go ahead! Walk in the footsteps of your fathers! Why don’t you go ahead and kill Me, too and continue your family tradition!”

“*There is nothing new under the sun,*” said the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. Murderous thoughts and looks are as old as the fall into sin. Cain’s downcast eyes became murderous toward his brother. The cause of murder is always the work of man, but the original source is the devil, who, Jesus says, was a liar and murderer from the beginning. St. John says that the murderer Cain “*was of the evil one.*” In addressing the Jews who wanted to kill Him, Jesus identifies Satan as the father of all who hate God’s Son.

But how does that pertain to us? Aren’t John and Jesus just wailing on Cain and the murderous Jews? Surely the Lord’s not talking to us pious and faithful Christians, is He? But listen to His

Word. His apostle St. John writes, *“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”* And a bit later, *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”* Follow the logic. If I claim to love God while hating my brother, I am both a murderer and a liar and cannot love God, and if I don’t love Him, then I must hate Him. Looks like Cain and the hostile Jews and all of us are in the same boat. This is why we make this confession to Jesus in stanza 4 of the hymn *“Upon the Cross Extended”*:

I caused Your grief and sighing

By evils multiplying

As countless as the sands.

I caused the woes unnumbered

With which Your soul is cumbered,

Your sorrows raised by wicked hands.

Don’t lie to yourself. You have said in your heart, *“I have reasons for hating my parents. I can make excuses for wishing that my brother were dead. I have good cause for casting an evil eye upon my neighbor.”* That’s enough to make you a murderer in God’s sight and place you under His wrath. The Jews filled up the measure of their fathers in tonight’s Gospel Reading, and if we’re honest with ourselves, we have to see ourselves right along with them.

It's an amazing thing, then, that the Father would allow His Son to be murdered at the hands of sinful men, just to save a bunch of rotten, rebellious sinners with eyes filled with rage against God and man. St. Paul writes to the Romans, *“But God shows His love for us in that while we*

were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God."

The wrath of God is not a murderous glance from the Father, but a look of righteous judgment upon the guilt of sin. We all deserve God's wrath just as much as I deserved my dad's punishment, but instead of giving us what we deserved, God put it on Jesus, and Jesus willingly took it, for us men and for our salvation. He showed us grace, His undeserved favor.

From the cross, Jesus looked upon the masses of people and said, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Original sin, which produces lies, hatred, murder, and every other sin, is so deep a corruption that we cannot recognize the depravity of what we think, say, and do unless it is revealed by God's Word. But once our murderous eyes have looked in horror on what we really have done—nailing the innocent Son of God to the tree with our sins—then we also are ready for the joyful Good News of the forgiveness of all of our sins for the sake of Christ's voluntary sacrifice at the hands of murderers, the death by which He has extinguished the wrath of God toward us. *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*

Rejoicing is one of the themes in Lent. So, rejoice in Christ, who has turned your murderous eyes away from sin, guilt, and despair and lifted them up to look upon Himself as your Savior.

Amen.