

Lenten Midweek 2 2022 “Malchus” John 18 1 to 11

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

On January 17, 2004, a sixty-six ton sperm whale died and was beached on the southwestern coast of Taiwan. Two weeks later, authorities decided to truck the dead whale to a laboratory, where they could do an autopsy. It took fifty men and three lifting cranes thirteen hours to hoist the whale onto a flatbed trailer. People poured into the streets of a local city to watch the spectacle of a whale carcass being driven through their downtown.

And then it happened! As the truck crawled through the city, with crowds looking on, the whale exploded. That’s right, the whale exploded! The insides of the whale splattered cars, people, and local shops. Traffic stopped for hours. The smell was almost unbearable. Betcha no one saw that coming!

Isn’t life just like that sometimes? We’re going about our business, and a whale explodes! We’re left hurt and confused, with lots of questions that begin with this word: Why? Why did she leave me? Why did he have to die so young? Why did we lose so much money? Why does our daughter or son continue to cause us so much pain? Why? Why? *Why?*

Today, as we continue our march through the Lenten season, we come to John 18 and meet Malchus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Malchus was going about his business, and before he knows it, it was as though a whale exploded. Suddenly, his right ear was cut off by a fisherman from Galilee. No one saw that coming!

The crowd gathers. “Now Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with His disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons” (John 18:2–3). The “band” or cohort were Roman soldiers.

Roman soldiers will also come into the picture on the next day—that’s when they will mock Jesus, flog Jesus, and crucify Jesus. The crowd that gathers here is a crowd of Romans (who controlled the country), chief priests (who controlled the temple), and Pharisees (who controlled the religion). This is like the Supreme Court and Congress sending the FBI to arrest Jesus!

Who’s leading this Jewish posse with so much firepower and muscle? Judas! And what is Judas up to? Betrayal. Every time we celebrate Holy Communion, we hear the words, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed.” This is that night!

The chaos commences. “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus)” (John 18:10). Peter cuts off Malchus’s right ear. The crowd gathers, and the chaos commences. For Malchus, that’s when the whale exploded!

Has a mess suddenly appeared in your life? Are you doing everything you can to survive? Have you consulted the bank? changed your diet? called an attorney? tightened your budget? gone into counseling or rehab or therapy? Don’t give up! Don’t ever give up! Why?

The control is clear. Whose control? Christ's control! It's very clear! Judas, the Jews, and the Romans appear to be running things. Let me accent the word *appear*. Christ is really the one in control! How so?

"Jesus, knowing all that would happen to Him, came forward" (John 18:4). The control is clear! When His enemies come, Christ goes out to meet them. When Judas approaches, Christ doesn't run. When Peter strikes Malchus, Christ commands Peter to put away his sword.

Listen to what Jesus says, "No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord" (John 10:18). Though the powers of darkness rise against Him—full throttle—Christ is in control. Matthew's Gospel tells us that at this point Jesus could ask His Father for more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). Twelve legions of angels? There were 6,000 men in one Roman legion. Do the math— $12 \times 6,000 = 72,000$ angels! Christ doesn't need 72,000 angels because Christ is in absolute control!

During World War II, psychologists compared ground troops with fighter pilots. They determined that after sixty days of continuous combat, the anxiety of ground troops was off the charts. After sixty days, though, an astounding 93 percent of fighter pilots were happy and at peace. Why is that? The fighter pilots had control. They had their hands on the throttle! Ground troops, on the other hand, felt forlorn and helpless. They could just as easily be killed standing still or running away. What's the point? Popular wisdom tells us, "Always seek control!"

We don't need a war to prove it. All we need is a backup on the interstate highway! A team of German researchers recently found that a traffic jam triples our chances of a heart attack. Makes sense. That's why popular wisdom tells us, "Always seek control!"

So, what's the plan when a whale explodes? Follow the popular wisdom. "Always seek control!" Never board a plane without a parachute. Never leave the house without a gas mask. Never step on a crack lest you break your mother's back. That's it. Face every exploding whale by taking control.

There's only one problem with this popular wisdom. It doesn't work! Would you like something that does work? Rather than seek control, relinquish control—give it all up! Let go! Resign as CEO of the universe! Give your entire mess to Jesus. Christ's control is clear!

And His calm is contagious. "This was to fulfill the word that He had spoken: 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost not one'" (John 18:9). Christ is calm because He trusts the Scriptures. Christ's calm is contagious!

In a *Peanuts* comic strip, Lucy is struggling with her Sunday School memory verse. Finally, she suggests that maybe it's a verse from the "Book of Reevaluations."
The Book of Reevaluations!

The Scriptures are a book of reevaluations! They help us reevaluate who really is in control. John 1:29: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Christ is in control of sin—and He takes it all away. John 4:14: "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again."

Christ is in control of our aching thirst—he quenches it with His unconditional love. John 8:12: “I am the light of the world.” Christ is in control of darkness. He is the light of the world.

When parents send their children to camp, they have to sign a form that asks this important question: Who is the responsible party? If Johnny breaks his arm or Suzie breaks out with measles, who is the responsible party? So, a parent signs his or her name.

Christ signed His name for us—and He wrote it in His own blood. When we were baptized, Jesus took full responsibility for us. When the whale explodes, Jesus is the responsible party! Not us! It’s His job to see us through. Christ is the Shepherd; we are the sheep. Christ is the Bridegroom; we are the Bride. Christ is the Rabbi; we are the disciples. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness!”

One of three things is happening in our lives right now. We are either heading for a mess or we are in a mess or we just went through a mess. No matter what, we don’t have to become hopeless or anxious or faithless. We can stay calm. Why?

When whales explode, Jesus delivers perfect peace. He reaches out His hand and heals us. Don’t believe me? Then just ask a man named Malchus. And how does Jesus come to us today to deliver us, heal us, and wash away our sin? In word and Sacrament, right here in the ark of God’s church! Praise be to Jesus!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!