

Murderous Eyes

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Eyes on Jesus / Murder; Forgiveness / Mark 14:1–2; Mark 14:53–65

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.

“If looks could kill.” 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 Passion 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 spewed venom or shot an arrow from their eyes at the Lord, they would have.

I’m sure you have all been in some situation like this. You are or have been a child and you have all done something to deserve punishment. How many of you remember vividly being chastised for something you did wrong and then muttering the words at mom or dad, “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!” out of the earshot of your mom or dad of course. When you said those words, I’m sure your eyes had that murderous look the Jews had. But deep down inside of you, I’m sure that you knew what was coming for the misdeed and needed to be sorry and change your ways. I know when I’ve been in such a situation that’s how I responded and knew in my heart.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” said Jesus, no doubt with a rather stern, fatherly look. This rhetoric wouldn’t fit with Dale Carnegie’s advice given in his 1936 bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. 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 malice, but only because we need to recognize our sin and know what to repent of.

“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” said Jesus.

English Standard Version Chapter 23

For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, 30 saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

Jesus wanted them to recognize their rank hypocrisy and repent. So He mockingly says, “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers” to bring them face-to-face with the murder that lay in their hearts under their pious pretenses of honoring the murdered prophets and behind their pious platitudes of “We wouldn’t have done what our fathers did.” But multi-generational guilt is real when the sons of the fathers lack repentance, so Jesus challenges them to push things forward to their logical conclusion: “I know your hearts! I can see the murder in your eyes! Go ahead! Walk in the steps 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 agency of man, but the original source is the devil, who Jesus says, was a liar and a 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 taking to us pious Christians, is He? But listen to His Word. His apostle St. John Writes,

English Standard Version Chapter 3

15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

And a bit later,

English Standard Version Chapter 4

20 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 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." (LSB 453:4)

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 or my government leader." 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 today's/tonight's Passion Reading, and if we're honest with ourselves, we must see ourselves right along with them.

What a marvel, 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. Listen to these words from Romans 5, words that you heard the last time we were gathered together in person:

English Standard Version Chapter 5

8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 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 father's punishment or you deserved yours, 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.

From the cross, Jesus looked upon the masses of humanity 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 have 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 our sins for the sake of Christ's voluntary sacrifice at the hands of murderers, the death of which He has extinguished the wrath of God toward us.

English Standard Version Chapter 5

10 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.

11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Rejoicing is the theme of the Fourth Sunday in Lent. Even though we think we don't have much to rejoice in right now. You do have one thing for sure, you have Christ. 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.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.