

**BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH      March 26, 2023**

# **“OUT OF THE SHADOWS”**

**Pastor Mike Corwin**

**5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT**

**TEXT: JOHN 19:38-42**

**SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 53:1-9**

## **I – THE PASSION:**

It is all over for another year. The nominations were made, the voting was done, the red carpet was rolled out, and the Oscars were given out for the best movies in 2022 as voted on by those in Hollywood. The 95<sup>TH</sup> annual Academy Awards ceremony was held two weeks ago, and we now know who got all the big awards for things like best movie, actor, actress, supporting stars and the other major awards. I want to take you back for a moment to the 77<sup>th</sup> academy awards in 2004. That year the three top movies for 2004 were the Aviator about the life of Howard Hughes, the Million Dollar Baby- a movie about a female boxer, and Ray- the movie based on the life of Ray Charles.

The big question that year among Christian circles was – where is The Passion? You remember the Passion, the movie about the last week of Jesus’ life made by Mel Gibson? Complaints were made that it had not been nominated for any of the awards. It is probably a legitimate question. According to the ranking of all the movies for the year 2004, The Passion came in in third place. The aviator was #23, Million Dollar Baby #35, and Ray was #37, yet they received all the awards. How could this be?

I don’t know why this should have surprised anyone. You see the nominations and all the voting is done by members of the Academy, comprised of those who work in Hollywood, on films. These are the people who worship Crystals and come up with a new religion every other year so they can justify their actions of multiple partners, rampant divorce, drug usage, and the making of films which are dominated by hatred, sex, violence, and all of it in colorful graphics. These are the people whose life philosophy and the message of their movies are “EVERYONE FOR THEMSELVES” AND “IF IT FEELS GOOD DO IT.” Why did anyone expect a film like THE PASSION to get recognition from such a group? These people have rejected the Gospel message of Jesus for years!

## **II – OUT OF THE SHADOWS:**

Let me ask you this though...does it really matter? Do you think Mel Gibson made the film to win fame or awards? I do not. I think Mel Gibson made the film because he reached the point in his life where he knew it was time to share his Faith. He knew that to continue to live and work in

Hollywood and not stand up for his beliefs was just another kind of rejection towards Jesus. Mel had been living in the shadow of the cross for years and it was time to come out into the light. It was time to share what he knew about Jesus with others. Time to pick up his cross and follow Jesus.

As we seek Jesus and explore our Faith it's in the shadow of the cross. As we find our Salvation and the relationship with the Savior it's in the shadow of the cross and we want to stay there, don't we? In the shadow of the cross it's all about me and what Jesus did for me. It's all about love and compassion that drove God to send his Son to die for me. It can be upsetting and emotional in the shadow of the cross, but it's safe. The trouble is we can only change ourselves when we live in the shadow of the cross.

It's when we step out of the shadows that we can change others. It's when we obey Jesus and pick up our own cross and follow him that lives are affected, that others find their Salvation in the cross's shadow. It was when he stepped out of the shadows and made a movie, he knew would be rejected by Hollywood that Mel Gibson affected the lives of millions of people, some of who now have a Faith and Salvation they didn't have before. I'm glad he stepped out of the shadows and shared his Faith with everyone. I only wish more would.

### **III – TEXT:**

In the story of the Passion, we find a story about two men who lived in the shadows while Jesus was preaching and doing ministry but came out of the shadows upon the death of Jesus. Their coming out of the shadows has allowed the Passion and Resurrection story to affect the lives of all those who have lived since:

#### **John 19:38 - 42 (NLT)**

<sup>38</sup>Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body down. When Pilate gave him permission, he came and took the body away. <sup>39</sup>Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night, also came, bringing about seventy-five pounds of embalming ointment made from myrrh and aloes. <sup>40</sup>Together they wrapped Jesus' body in a long linen cloth with the spices, as is the Jewish custom of burial. <sup>41</sup>The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. <sup>42</sup>And so, because it was the day of preparation before the Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

They were two very important and influential men. Both had wealth and power as Jewish religious leaders. Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus was a respected Jewish teacher, one of the leading Pharisees. Both share something else in common. They knew Jesus. They didn't just know him like the other Jewish religious leaders who had spent the last three years trying to trick, trap, and get rid of Jesus. They knew him as disciples. They had

both listened with open hearts and minds and been convicted by his words. They had both come to believe he was truly the Son of God as he claimed. They both became his disciples. Yet they did so in the shadows. They couldn't be seen with him by the other religious people, or they would lose their standing among the religious leaders of the time. To step out of the shadows and be seen in public sitting at his feet and listening to his preaching would have meant ridicule and expulsion. So, they met with him in private. Talked to him when no one else was around. The Bible records in John 3:1-15 about how Nicodemus came and spoke to Jesus in the night so he wouldn't be seen. It was to Nicodemus that Jesus gave the message that you had to be "born again" to find heaven. They were happy receiving the Word of God from the Son of God this way. It was safe in the shadows.

But today is different. Today they are overcome with the sorrow and agony of what has happened to this preacher they respected and loved. He has died. Not just an ordinary death, but one of great pain and misery on a Roman cross. A humiliating death they have watched from the shadows as he was tried and tortured. They stood by as he was nailed to the cross and mocked by the people and criminals who were being crucified with him. They listened as he cried out in anguish to God and died. They watched as the spear was thrust into his side to insure; he was dead. But there came a time they could hide in the shadows no more. They could not stand idly by and see Jesus further humiliated by leaving his corpse to rot on the cross and be attacked by birds, as was the custom. They could not stand to think of him being cast into a common pit with other bodies when he rotted and fell from the nails. So, they stepped out of the shadows. They used their political influence to get Pilate to release the body to them. They knew that by doing so they were putting themselves in danger. They knew to be associated with Jesus at this time was not a popular move among the Romans, the religious leaders, or the people, all of whom had called for his death. And yet they did it anyhow. They stepped forward, claimed the body, wrapped it in linen and perfume to hide the effects of the coming decay, and laid him in a tomb in the garden close to the hill of death called Calvary. They did it all in a hurry so it would be finished before Sundown and the Sabbath day.

Their Faith had matured, and they stepped out of the shadows, becoming names in the Passion of Jesus. And because they did, lives have been changed ever since. The women who stood in the shadows and watched knew where to go that First Easter morning to finish preparing the body of their Lord. It was there that the story of Resurrection and Salvation became known when they found the tomb empty. Joseph and Nicodemus had played their part in the story of Salvation and Resurrection we celebrate in our Faith over 2000 years later. Aren't you glad they stepped out of the shadows and let everyone know they were disciples of Jesus Christ?

#### **IV – EVIL COMES OUT OF THE SHADOWS:**

As I read the story of the Passion again this week, I made a startling discovery. Evil does not seem to have any problems with coming out of the shadows. As I read the story of what happened that led to Jesus' arrest and death it dawned on me that that night in the Garden, there was one

Disciple who stepped out of the shadows... Judas. Judas stepped out of the shadows, kissed Jesus, and sealed his fate. Evil stepped out of the shadows and it started the death march for our Lord.

What did the rest of the disciples do? They scattered, they ran away and hid in the shadows. Peter, who was supposed to be the rock upon which Jesus would build the church ran away, hid in the shadows, and denied he even knew this Jesus. All the disciples hid in the shadows as Jesus was tried and tortured. None of them stepped forward and argued when the crowd demanded his death before Pilate. None of the disciples tried to stop the execution of an innocent man. They all hid in the shadows and allowed him to be murdered.

As I look around at society today, I can see example after example of how evil is still brave enough to step out of the shadows, while Christians remain in them. Innocent people still suffer today because Christianity remains hidden while evil has its way.

### **V – TIME TO COME OUT:**

It is time that Christians came out of the shadows and started to affect the lives of others. It is time we quit rejecting Jesus by our silence. It's time we stop hiding in the shadow of the cross and truly pick it up and carry it for the entire world to see.

- We've stood by while government has been overtaken by greedy, self-serving bureaucrats more worried about lining their own pockets instead of serving the citizens and we can't figure out why we hear story after story of embezzlement and abuse of power...it's time to come out of the shadows.
- We let our children watch MTV and racy movies and then can't figure out why the teenage pregnancy rate and juvenile assaults statistics are out of sight...it's time to come out of the shadows.
- We took the golden rule out of their lives and gave them music lyrics and video games laden with violence and can't figure out why kids kill themselves and others...it's time to come out of the shadows.
- We've taken all references to religion out of the schools and scheduled sporting events to clash with established religious days and then can't figure out why the school system is going down the tubes...it's time to come out of the shadows.

If the disciples of Jesus don't step out of the shadows and start changing society soon, we're going to end up being like Joseph and Nicodemus...we'll step out of the shadows only after Jesus is completely dead in society...and then bury him and our faith.

**AMEN**