

August 24, 2025

The Gospel of John
“Gather Into One”
John 11:45-57

Rev. John DuBose
 Easley Presbyterian Church
 Easley, South Carolina

As the father of young children, I get to watch a lot of children’s TV. There’s one show that I particularly love called Bluey. Maybe you’ve heard of it. It’s an Australian cartoon about a dog named Bluey and her family life. And in one episode, Bluey and her family are about to move to a new town because her dad got a new job. And Bluey is having a hard time processing this change, so her preschool teacher tells her a beautiful story. And here’s the story:

A farmer’s horse runs away. Everyone says, “Oh no, how unlucky!” The farmer simply replies, “Maybe.” The next day, the horse returns—with more wild horses. “How lucky!” people say. Again, the farmer says, “Maybe.” His son tries to tame one of the wild horses and breaks his leg. “How unlucky!” “Maybe,” says the farmer. Then soldiers come to recruit young men for war—but they pass over the farmer’s son because of his injury. “How lucky!” And once more, the farmer says, “Maybe.”¹

Bluey is confused by the story. So she asks her teacher if it has a happy ending or a sad ending. Her teacher replies, “It’s both.”

I love that story because I think it highlights something we know to be true in the Christian life. It’s hard to see what God is doing in any given moment. Like, if it’s raining, is it because God doesn’t want me to cut the grass? Or is there some bigger purpose to the rain? Ultimately, the God who creates and sustains the universe is unknowable unless he makes himself known.

The apostle Paul says,

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”²

There are two questions for us to consider this morning as we read this text: the first is - what are the people in our story up to, and second question, far more difficult to answer, is what is God up to? The lines get blurry on these two questions, because it’s not entirely clear where the actions of the people end and the action of God begins.

So, if the second question is difficult to answer, perhaps we should focus on the first question. What are the people in our story for this morning up to. And that’s a far easier question, because we are all intimately familiar with the human heart, aren’t we? All its wants and desires, all its fears and apprehensions. One pastor jokes that “there’s nothing in his heart but cholesterol

¹ Bluey – “The Sign”

² Romans 11:33-36

and sin.”³ I can certainly agree. And it’s on full display in this morning’s text. What are the people in this story up to? Well, they’re making plans to kill Jesus. Verse 53 says, “from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”

But why? Because they’re afraid. Afraid of losing control. We talked a little bit about fear last week. In the immortal words of the prophet, Yoda, “fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”⁴ The religious leaders are afraid of Jesus, and so they hate him. They said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

You see, they’re in a precarious position. They’ve struck a delicate balance with the Romans by being able to maintain their religious practices. Not everyone got to do that under Roman rule. And along comes Jesus, threatening to disrupt their very way of life. The hard truth of the matter is that we can probably see where they’re coming from, can’t we? We’re not quite as different from the chief priests and Pharisees as we’d like to imagine, are we?

I was scrolling through Facebook this past week. I’m not proud of that habit, but that’s beside the point. And on this particular day, I saw an article about something outrageous that a in Wisconsin had done. As you can imagine, the comments on the article were vicious. One commenter said, “If Jesus were around today, Christians would crucify him all over again.” What he meant, I think, was that Christians are very bad at being Christian.

But you know what, he’s probably right. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, John says, “He came to his own, but his own did not receive him.” What makes us think we could do any better? Following Jesus means giving him control. Paul says, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” That’s a scary thing. We don’t want to do that. There are parts of our lives that we’re afraid of losing control over. Maybe it’s a job that gives us status. Maybe it’s a tradition we’ve long carried. Maybe it’s a certain belief about ourselves or others. Something that makes us feel safe and in-control.

Jesus threatened the idea that the religious leaders had any control. His radical defiance of the religious and political and social systems; his authority over nature and disease and spiritual forces and even death itself. Jesus is revealing to them a very troubling truth – That any control or power that they might think they have is an illusion. The reason they grasp so desperately at any semblance of control is that they have so little of it. The same goes for us. So much of what happens to us is beyond our control. But if we’re not in control, then who is? The nihilist says that nobody is in control. The Christian, however, trusts that God is in control. The Christian confesses that true power – true control – belongs to God alone. And God’s purposes will not be thwarted.

So, what are God’s purposes? Remember, we asked two questions: what are the people up to, and what is God up to? The people are planning to kill Jesus. So, what about that second question? What is God up to? You recall that the chief priests and Pharisees are all arguing about what to do with Jesus when Caiaphas, the high priest, chimes in to say, “You know nothing at all.

³ [Epiphany 6 \(C\): Filled With Cholesterol... and Sin](#)

⁴ Star Wars: The Phantom Menace

Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”

For all the reasons of human sin that we’ve talked about already, Caiaphas decides that it’s best for Jesus to die. But what he doesn’t realize is that God’s purposes are working out even through this evil decision he has made. In verse 51, John tells us, “He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

God used Caiaphas, despite all the evil intentions of his very human heart, to prophecy the things that were to come. To paraphrase another verse from the Bible, “what he intended for evil, God intended for good.” God’s purposes move forward always because God alone is sovereign. Theologians call this the doctrine of God’s Providence. One of our Presbyterian confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, asks the question, “What do you understand by the providence of God? The answer, then is,

“The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty— all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.”⁵

Perhaps that is so. Perhaps God is in charge of all things seen and unseen. But there is so much that has gone wrong in this world. So much evil and hardship. How can we trust that God’s purposes for us are good when so much around us seems to be so bad? We’ve talked about the root of human sin already, but if God is indeed so powerful, then what is God doing about it?

One of my favorite hobbies is hiking. I got to do it a little bit this past summer while I was in Montreat with our youth. And in Montreat, there’s a mountain called Lookout. The hike to the top of Lookout is brutal. Straight up at certain spots. And if that’s all that it was, then it wouldn’t be all that popular. In fact, I don’t know anyone who would trouble themselves with it. But the reason that the mountain is so well loved is that once you reach the top, the beauty of all that lies below you is overwhelming. It’s truly awesome in the literal sense of the word.

Our lives, too, are filled with such hardship and sorrow and pain. Hard, unforgiving terrain that sometimes seems too difficult to climb. Now, I’m not saying that if you push through the pain, you will earn a great reward. Because that’s seldom the case. It’s an imperfect metaphor because not all suffering has a payoff. Sometimes it’s only pain. But the good news for us is that someone has climbed that hill of sin and suffering for us. Someone has carried us on his back, and his name is Jesus. We know that everything that happens to us is for our good because of what God has done for us in Jesus.

He has won for us the reward we could not earn for ourselves. In him, all that is wrong in this world has been and will be redeemed. With him, we will one day look out on the beauty of all that lies below us. All our suffering, all our sin, all our fears and anger and hate will one day be consumed and burned away in the glorious light of God. And why? For no other reason than that he loves us. By rights, we are God’s creatures. Nothing more and nothing less. God could very well ignore us if that was his will. But by God’s grace in Jesus Christ, God makes us more

⁵ Presbyterian Book of Confessions 2016 – 4.027

than creatures – he makes us his beloved children. We now know him not only as creator, but as loving Father because of what he has done for us in Jesus Christ our brother. God cares for us. And nothing can ultimately frustrate God’s good purposes for the ones he loves. Paul says,

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁶

What is God up to? He’s working all things round to good because he loves us. One theologian says,

Providence does not mean that evil does not happen. Providence means that evil is not ultimate, that it does not and will not have the last word. It means, further, that in spite of the evils we witness and suffer, God has not abandoned us; the story is not without a plot; the author has not lost control of his narrative...

Providence, in short, makes a promise. It says that human history may sometimes seem like one long crucifixion, but at the end of it lies an empty tomb.⁷

The chief priests and pharisees made plans to kill Jesus. But God had long ago made plans to raise him from the dead. John says, “Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” That’s you. That’s me. That’s the beauty of the God who has made himself known in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God.

⁶ Romans 8:35,37-39

⁷ [The Consolation of Providence - Christianity Today](#)