

Julia was 13 when her heart stopped beating in a junior high classroom. She'd had a heart condition since birth, and it had worsened. After restarting her heart with an AED, paramedics rushed Julia to the hospital, where doctors determined the only way to sustain her life was through a heart transplant. Julia waited in the hospital for six months, until the good news came...a heart was available!

The doctor stepped into her hospital room with a smile on his face, and a cooler marked "Human Organ for Transplant—handle with care" in his hands. And Julia shouted to the nurses, "Take him away! Get him away from me!"

OK, that last part didn't really happen. Julia got the heart transplant and is now a healthy young adult. But how preposterous, how unfathomable would it have been for Julia to call for the man who literally held her life in his hands to be taken away! There was one thing she needed for life, and he had it. Why would she ever want him taken away?

And yet, something even more preposterous takes place in our sermon text today.

It was early Good Friday morning, and Jesus was standing trial before Pontius Pilate at a place called the Stone Pavement, or Gabbatha...which means "The seat of rendering judgment." Knowing Jesus had done nothing wrong, Pilate had unsuccessfully tried to set him free. But finally, Pilate presented Jesus to the crowds, having had him beaten, flogged, and dressed in a mock purple robe and crown of thorns, proclaiming, "**Here is your king.**"

And how quickly the shouts of "**Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel!**" that had echoed through Jerusalem's streets on Palm Sunday were drowned out by the angry, hateful shouts of the bloodthirsty crowd, "**Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!**"

Like a patient with terminal heart disease shouting for the only person who could save her to be taken away, the Jews had no idea that as they screamed "Take him away!" they were asking to be separated from the one man who could save them from their terminal heart disease of sin.

Why did they hate Jesus so completely? What had he done besides heal the sick, the blind, and the lame, drive out demons, feed the hungry, raise the dead, and most importantly, correctly proclaim God's Word? What evil is there in that? Obviously none! What Jesus had said the night before was true, "**They hated me without reason.**"

They weren't clamoring for Jesus' death because of some crime he'd committed. Rather, they craved Jesus' blood, because by his teaching and claims he made about being the Son of God, Jesus was disrupting and endangering the Jews earthly peace, security, and prosperity. Jesus challenged their self-righteous way of life, and their earthly focus.

Earlier, when the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, was plotting to kill Jesus, they said, "**If we let Jesus go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our Temple and our nation.**"

The Chief Priests and teachers of the law should have been the ones most ardently pointing people to Jesus, and focusing on eternity, but instead, they were entirely focused on their earthly lives. So focused that when Pilate presented their true King, Jesus, they screamed "Take him away!" and the Chief Priests said, "**We have no king but Caesar.**"

Please don't miss the sad irony of that statement. The same people who started rejecting Jesus when they realized he wasn't there to overthrow Caesar and the Romans, pledging their undying loyalty to the man that they hated only slightly less than Jesus.

And do you know what that "loyalty" to Caesar got them? 40 years later, Caesar commanded his armies to attack Jerusalem, killing thousands of Jews, and destroying the Temple. Yet, with terrible screams—the Greek word is the same as the sound baying dogs make—they screamed, "**Take him away!**" about the Lord of life.

How could they have been so blind? How could they call for the only one who could save them to be taken away from them?

And yet, haven't we done the same? Maybe screaming at Pilate with the crowds. But don't our sinful actions and sinful heart display a desire to remove Jesus from the picture? Like those Jews, aren't there days when we long for Jesus' words and commands to disappear, leaving us to focus on our earthly lives and sinful desires unimpeded?

Every sin we commit stems from a sinful heart that thinks we're better off following our own desires than following Jesus. Just as Satan was there on Good Friday, pouring out his hatred through the lips and hands of the people, Satan is here, quick to point out Jesus' words and say, "Take Jesus away! You be in control! You don't need him in your life!"

But if we send away Jesus so we can crown the "Caesars" of this world as our true kings, what a price we pay for buying into that lie. The Jews loyalty to Caesar ended with their death and destruction. Any time we serve the sinful "Caesars" of our lives instead of Jesus, it also leads to death and destruction—eternal death and destruction.

Ultimately, everyone will stand before the Judgment Seat. But on that day, it won't be Pilate, but God himself making the judgments. Our sinful rebellion against our Savior makes us deserving to hear the verdict from God, "Take him away...take her away...take them away eternally to hell."

As those terrible words burst from the lips of the Jews, and from our sinful hearts, we should shudder with revulsion and fear. But as we turn away from the jeering crowds, our hearts can fill with hope. Because Jesus is being taken away, and he doesn't try stopping them. ***"Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull. Here they crucified him."***

Certainly, Jesus in his power could have stopped the soldiers. Just like he'd done in the Garden, he could have knocked them all to the ground with just his voice. But he doesn't. Instead, he marches silently and willingly to the hill where he would give his life as the Savior, the Savior even of those who craved his blood and death. Willingly taken away so he could carry out his Father's gracious plan of redemption for this sinful world.

I don't think it was a coincidence that this took place on the Day of Preparation for the Passover, because the Father's gracious plan was so beautifully foreshadowed in the Passover. The day when the Jews were to take an innocent, spotless lamb, and slaughter it. Then, they were to paint the doorframes of their houses with that lamb's blood, so that the angel of death would pass over their houses. The blood of a lamb delivered the Israelites from death and destruction. Not because they were any less sinful than the Egyptians, but because God is gracious.

An even greater deliverance took place at that skull-shaped hill. Again, the blood of a lamb was being shed. But this time, it was the perfect, holy blood of the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world. The blood of Jesus that covers our sins and guilt. The blood of Jesus that is our righteousness.

This blood, our forgiveness, our eternal future—that's what Jesus was carrying up Golgotha's hill with that crossbeam. Willingly taken away, in order to fulfill his Father's gracious plan to save us.

And because of that, at the last day when we stand before God at the Judgment Seat, we will hear, "Take him away...take her away." But not to eternity in hell. Rather, through faith in Jesus, we will be taken away to eternal glory in Heaven.

It would have been ludicrous for Julia to tell her doctor to get away from her. That man, through a new heart, held her life in his hands. In the same way, Jesus holds our eternal life in his hands. Hands that were willingly nail-pierced, so that you might have a new heart, and a new life. And so that you would never have to be taken away from Jesus.