

LESSON 43

A Symphony of Love

Summary

Jesus performs a symphony of love when soldiers seize him at Gethsemane. He is not mastered by any of the evil that he encounters. He is truly the holy warrior.

Chapter in *Love Walked Among Us—21a: A Symphony of Love*.

Outline

1. 12:00a Gethsemane 30 min
2. Esther—The Reluctant Bride 25-min Total 55 min

Goals

Love: Esther Werema was a model of love; like Jesus, she loved with compassion, honesty, and faith in God.

Jesus: Seeing the beauty of how Jesus loves leads us to worship him.

Lesson Preparation

The next three lessons are meant to lead the people in your group to worship. You want the group to be captured by the beauty of Jesus. Let Jesus capture your heart as you read each lesson ahead of time.

1. 12:00a Gethsemane

30 min.

Q. How do we respond when we're under pressure (when we aren't relying on God)?



[Write their answers.] Most of us collapse in some way.



Teach: Pressure becomes an excuse for loving others poorly or for not loving at all. We're all characterized by entropy—starting well and finishing poorly. But Jesus is different; he starts well and finishes in a symphony of love. Last week, we left Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he went to pray with his disciples. Around midnight Judas arrives, leading a large group of soldiers and High Priests.



Read: Luke 22:47-48—Trying to Reach Judas

Q. What is Judas doing here?

Betraying Jesus.

Q. What does he appear to be doing?

Greeting an old friend.

Q. What is particularly evil about what Judas is doing?

He appears to honor Jesus with a kiss, but it's just a way of identifying Jesus in the darkness. He uses an ordinarily affectionate gesture to betray a close friend to his death.

Q. In his question to Judas, what two things does Jesus compare to expose Judas' evil intentions?

Jesus' question contrasts the outward sweetness of Judas' kiss with the inward motivation of betrayal.

Q. How does Jesus reach out to Judas?

[Various answers.] Jesus tries to convict Judas, to reach his heart before it's too late.



Teach: Judas. Jesus takes off Judas' mask and contrasts the mask (outer sweetness) with what's underneath (betrayal). Jesus holds a mirror up to Judas to show him how evil he is. The next time we encounter Judas, he throws his 30 pieces of silver into the temple and screams, "I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). Then Judas ends his life, overcome by the realization of his own evil.

Nature of Evil. The very nature of evil is to corrupt goodness, so evil is almost always masked by something that appears to be good. The victim of evil is therefore often confused, especially when first confronted by the evil that's masquerading as good. So the initial feel of evil is confusion. Jesus slices through Judas' mixed signals with his honesty.



Read: John 18:1-9—Protecting the Disciples

Q. What does Jesus do to love his disciples here?

In v. 8, he protects them by telling the soldiers to let the disciples go.

Q. How does Jesus' love for his disciples affect how he places his body?

In v. 4, Jesus comes out of the grove of trees, leaving the disciples behind in relative safety.

 **Gospel Connection:** First Jesus protects his disciples with his words, and then he places his body between the soldiers and his disciples. This movement is like the atonement—exchanging his life for theirs.

Q. Do the soldiers forcibly take Jesus' life, or does he offer himself willingly?

Jesus offers himself willingly, as the perfect lamb.

Q. In what way does Jesus submit to his Father here?

He offers to forfeit his life, instead of seeking to preserve it.

 **Teach:** Remember what Jesus said earlier: “I lay down my life.... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord” (John 10:17-18).

Q. Who is in control of this situation?

Jesus.

Q. How does Jesus identify himself?

“I am he.”



Old Testament Background

“I am”

In the Greek text, Jesus actually says, “I am.” *I am* is the divine name that God revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14). The Jews would recognize it as a subtle claim to divinity. (So picture the light of the 50 torches dancing on Jesus. Without a trace of fear, he walks out of the protection of the grove of trees and says, “I am.”)

Q. How do the soldiers respond when Jesus says, “I am”?

They fall back.

Q. Why do you think they fall back?

[Various answers. Teach what they do not say.]

- They aren't used to “criminals” acting this way, fearlessly offering themselves.
- His majesty—comprised of his complete lack of fear, his calmness in the midst of hatred, and his authority.
- Because he said, “I am”—a divine claim.



Read: John 18:10-11; Luke 22:50-51—Protecting the Soldiers

“But Jesus answered, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched the man's ear and healed him” (Luke 22:51).

Q. Who else does Jesus protect in this passage?

Malchus. (And his ear.)

Q. Why do you think Peter started a fight? What was he trying to prove?

There are multiple possibilities: Peter was trying to prove that he was not a coward, that Jesus was wrong, or that he would never desert Jesus. Also, he had a genuine love for Jesus.

Q. In what way do you see Jesus' submission to his Father here?

He tells Peter, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11).

Q. Why do you think John mentions the name of the High Priest's servant?

- It fits with John's comment that the high priest knew John (John 18:15).
- Possibly Malchus became a Christian!
- It is typical of John's gospel, which contains detail that can only be explained satisfactorily as being from an eyewitness (see especially the number of fish caught in John 21:11.)

Q. How does Jesus heal Malchus?

With a touch of his hand.

Q. What will the soldiers do to that hand nine hours from now?

The will drive a nail through it.



Read: Mark 14:48-52—Rebuking the High Priests

[This question and Historical Background are interesting, but a digression.]

Q. What is odd about the mention of trying to grab the nameless disciple who runs away naked (vv. 51-52)?

First, the man is wearing no underwear. Second, the verse just hangs there without comment, as if others would know who this was.



Historical Background
John Mark

Biblical scholars think that this is Mark's "signature" as the author of this gospel. Many further think that John Mark's house was used for the Last Supper, because the same house is mentioned in Acts 12:12 as a center of worship in the early church. Gospel scholar Alfred Edersheim suggests this scenario: Mark is asleep in his house when Judas and the Roman soldiers arrive. He is in such a hurry to get to Gethsemane before Judas that he just throws on an outer garment. He arrives, but it's too late. When the soldiers capture Jesus, they also try to capture the disciples, but they flee into the safety of the night. When they grab Mark, he slips out of his cloak in order to escape and flees naked.

Q. In this study, we've talked about different ways that Jesus loves people. What way do we see in this scene with the priests?

He is being honest by rebuking them.

Q. What sin of the priests is Jesus exposing?

[Teach what they do not say.] Their cowardice. The priests would never come to get Jesus in daylight. He's also exposing their fear. He never advocated a rebellion yet they're coming like he's preached rebellion.

Q. In what way is Jesus' rebuke of the priests similar to his rebuke of Judas?

[Teach what they do not say; this is a complex answer.]

- With both, Jesus is exposing a lack of integrity by comparing "nice" behavior in public with malicious behavior in private. The priests, like Judas, were polite with Jesus in the daylight with crowds of people around. But hidden by the darkness, they become evil.
- With both, Jesus asks a question to try to reach their consciences. He is always reaching out.



Teach: Honesty. Later that night, there are times at Jesus' trial when he remains silent. He follows his own advice by not throwing his pearls to pigs (Matthew 7:5). But notice that Jesus' meekness doesn't mean that he's silent in the face of evil toward him. He stands up to evil.

Q. List all the ways people are being evil toward Jesus in this passage.



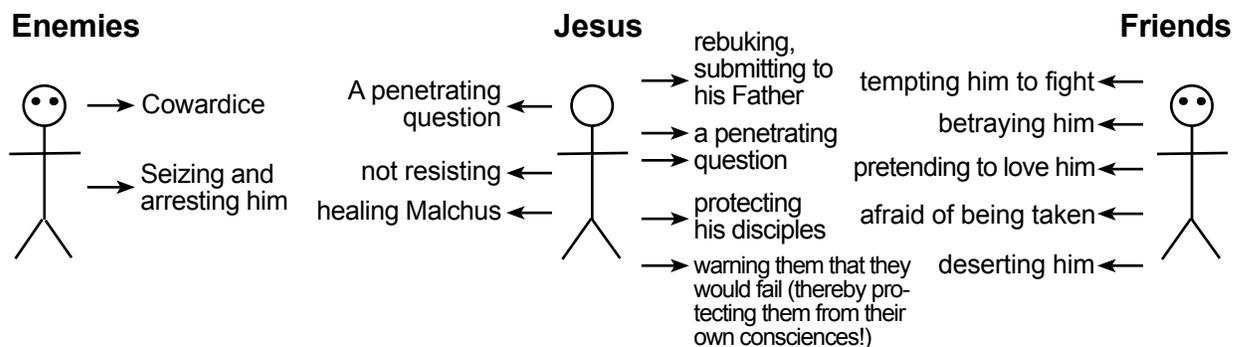
[Write their answers. Draw as they say the answers—see below. Leave space for Jesus' responses.] Striking, running, betraying, murdering, pretending, cowardice, fear.

Q. List the different ways that Jesus loves all of the evildoers around him.

[Draw arrows coming out of Jesus to the "evil" arrows as they say the answers—see below. Use a different color marker than the "evil" arrows.]



Draw: Jesus deflecting evil from all sides

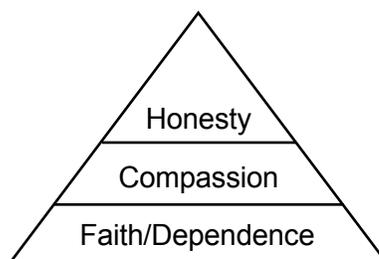


Q. What do you think of Jesus and the way that he behaves in this scene?

[Various answers; the purpose of this question is just to encourage worship.]



Draw: Triangle of love. [Quickly go through the different ways that Jesus loves in this passage, asking the group how each way corresponds with the three main ways that he has of loving—i.e., honesty, compassion, and faith/dependence.]



Q. Could you love the way Jesus does here?

[Various answers; most will say “no.”]



Teach: At the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). The main emphasis of the New Testament is not on the power of our sin and our inability to love, but on the power of the atonement and of the Holy Spirit living in us to help us love. (Don’t be afraid to have a life that is completely devoted to others in constant communion with Jesus! The key is the constant communion with Jesus.)

Principle: Love all the time.

2. Esther—The Reluctant Bride

25 min.

Listen to this story of someone loving all the time: Esther Werema, born 1942 in the Mkiroba tribe in Tanzania.¹

Cheerful voices and fragments of laughter floated down the path from the women up ahead. They ambled at the same deliberate pace they always used when walking in their fields.

But today they did not carry fifty-pound loads on heads or backs. Today the women’s Bible meeting was going to...[Esther’s] house for worship.

The path angled out of the village, up the hillside. We stayed on the bare earth footpath, watching for snakes and struggling over deep ruts eroded by rain gullies. We passed carefully weeded maize and groundnut fields, all hand-worked by the women farmers, and occasional thatch huts surrounded by goats and children.

As we climbed, I kept hanging back to drink in the view. From this elevation, Lake Victoria shone silver, ringed by pale violet hills on the far shore. The lake nestled among rolling, green-brown hills like those we climbed, fertile yet threatened by capricious droughts. . . .

The path continued up and wound sideways around the hill. We were heading for Esther’s compound to comfort her co-wife, who had lost a small child to illness a week earlier.

The compound consisted of neat mud-walled houses built close together, surrounded by carefully swept dust courtyards. Small fruit and shade trees, with songbirds dipping in and out; a green shamba or garden; and the muted colors of Lake Victoria below, shimmering in the distance—all gave the place a peaceful, Garden-of-Eden tranquility. *I could be happy living here*, I told myself. Except that here small children died, and their mothers grieved.

Palm leaf shade branches were laid flat on upright poles, shading fifteen folding chairs. The chairs had probably been hand-carried from the church. The women, in their brightly colored and patterned kangas, swept into the chairs like a flock of beautiful birds, subdued by the occasion.

We got out our hymnbooks and began singing familiar melodies with African shading and Swahili words. “Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,” which became “Kumtegemea Mwokozi.” Or “What a friend we have in Jesus,” which became “Yesu kwetu ni rafiki.”

One of the women had prepared some remarks and referred to her Bible often. The women left a small gift of money. But it was easy to see that it was the visit itself, the presence of the women, that lifted the middle-aged woman up in her grief. These women had walked to her compound and were blessing her with their prayer and total attention, a rare event.

An ancient man, almost blind and with parchment skin, made a speech to welcome us. The speech was only partly in touch with the occasion. He was treated with respect. Esther acted as hostess, for it was she who had invited her group to come. Even though she was the junior wife, it was obvious that her gentle stateliness made her the natural leader in the home. She bade all the women a gracious farewell.

It wasn’t until the next day that an interview with Esther alone had been arranged. When she came...to meet me, she had a list of excuses. She had many things to do that day and could only stay a short while. I could see she was shy and uncomfortable with the focus on her.

As we prayed together, and I shared my goals, Esther slowly allowed herself to relax. With elbows balanced on her wide open knees, with somber profile, thin, brown arms in sharp angles to her purple kanga shirt, she presented a lyrical African portrait of a “lady.” It was a pose I had seen on so many lovely batiks—the dye paintings popular with tourists.

She spoke softly, hesitantly... with Jan translating quietly for me. ...Esther began to tell her story, an incident at a time, as if puzzled as to why we would show interest in her.

“When I was young,” she began, “I had the gift of gentleness. The clan said I had inherited my nature from my grandmother. When we girls slept in the girls’ hut, the others would sneak out at night for adventures. But I didn’t. I had attended four years at a nearby primary school and had been baptized. I was young, but I was serious about wanting to follow Jesus.

“When I was sixteen years old, my father announced my marriage arrangements. Everyone was shocked. I would be sent to an eighty-five-year-old cousin, a non-Christian, as a fifth wife. The old man had a business buying and selling cows and ran a cream separator. In our village eyes, he was rich. He was willing to pay thirty-seven cows!”

Esther kept her eyes on the floor, her long, brown fingers weaving together nervously as she remembered her marriage. “I was afraid. I was forced into this marriage and I didn’t know what to do. I knew that neither my husband nor any co-wives were Christians. I feared most of all that this husband would not permit me to attend church, and I would be cut off from the fellowship of Christians. Later I got the courage to ask his permission. He agreed that I could go. I just praised God!

“Life was still difficult, however. The first wife was angry and jealous of me. And I thought, *Why should I be married to this old man!* Before I had children, I thought a lot about running away. But I knew that all those cows were gone. They had been used to arrange my brothers’ marriages. It would have been considered terrible to leave without returning the bride-price. I had to stay.

“After a time, I decided that I’d make the best of it and show that I could be a Christian even in this. Saying words means nothing if you don’t have actions to go with it. So I started to show others the life of Christ, and they responded.”

Hesitantly, in her low voice, Esther continued. “I didn’t go to dances, drink beer, or exchange bad words with people. The common way is for co-wives to live as enemies. But with my co-wives, I showed love, as though we were sisters. When I have food, and another wife doesn’t, I share. Even now, when I cook, I invite all the children to eat. Christ can fill us with love instead of hatred, so that everyone can be our friends and sisters.

“I began to know real joy in my life. As my eight children were born, I felt better about my situation. I saw that Jesus was the value in my life.

“The first wife came to love me. She was happy for me to do her field work. She acted as a grandmother to my children. Even today my children are close to her and call her Bibi, which means ‘grandmother.’

“We are all troubled by so many things. But we don’t have to hate or feel jealous if someone has something we don’t have. We don’t have to resent serving when someone else has invited a guest. When we walk in the light, we feel welcoming, close, friends with everyone.”

As Esther described her life in relational terms, I thought about her day-to-day life. In a Tanzanian village, a woman works from morning until night. There is water to carry, firewood to gather, fields to cultivate, flour to grind. Producing food and nurture for eight children is a monumental task. Yet Esther had obviously managed to find time to nurture others as well.

Two of Esther’s co-wives have accepted Christ and been baptized. By 1972, Esther’s witness had helped prepare Nyangi Warioba, her husband, and the first wife for baptism. . . .

Esther’s mother and her brothers—the ones who had been only too eager to use the cows she brought to the family—have also come to Christ.

“I speak to the children of my co-wives, too,” Esther continued. “One young woman said to me, ‘If I become a Christian, I will be a fool!’

“‘Yes,’ I replied to her, ‘people think we are crazy for being happy even though people do bad things to us. Try the way. See if you think it is foolishness. Learn the catechism, be baptized, and see.’

“Later the young woman became a Christian and came back to me.

“‘I spoke rudely to you for such a long, long time,’ she told me. ‘You always answered me kindly and patiently. Finally I was ready to follow your advice. Now I see how hard the Christian life is.’

“When I see someone walking in sin I feel sorrow at such a waste of life. I don’t hesitate to visit and say ‘There’s a way to stop bitterness in your life!’”

Esther’s voice became more animated. She smiled as she remembered changed lives. “Sometimes I see a woman who has children and is drinking too much. I wait until she is sober. Then I counsel her, ‘Sister, if you could leave this beer and follow Jesus you’d have a better life.’ I want her to be saved and to find some reason for living. I want to share my joy in Christ with others.”

“You are a midwife, too, aren’t you?” Jan interrupted.

“Yes, but I don’t charge anything.” Esther shrugged. “I volunteer if I am needed. Sometimes people need food or medicine; then I try to provide it.”

Ludia laughed. “We have a nickname for Esther. We call her ‘Mama Haruna.’ “ [There is a government welfare office called Bwana Haruna.]

“Last year, Esther was sent to her church district meetings,” Jan recalled. “She was the only woman delegate there. Even though she is so quiet, she spoke up frankly. She disagreed with church officials. This is rarely done by those caught up in church politics. However, this gave others the courage to deal openly with the issue and resolve it. I was really impressed with her.”

Esther shifted in her chair, stood up, and retied her kanga at the waist. When she resumed her eyes were sad. “I have struggles, too. Struggles I need to bring to God. My eldest daughter began having spells. She became incoherent and her arms and legs would shake. The local doctor told me it was a traditional illness and recommended a traditional doctor. [These spells, which are not uncommon in Africa, have often been associated with demon possession. They are treated as such by the traditional doctors.] I took her to Bunda to see this man. Instead of helping, he seduced her.

“Oh, I was angry and grieved. I prayed and prayed for my daughter. She elected to stay with this ‘husband’ and continued to have seizures. I knew he wasn’t treating her well.

“My advice to my children is always ‘Come to God!’ One can’t force it. We must wait and hope. It’s a little like digging in a hard place. One goes slowly, slowly, with great patience and eventually one succeeds.

“After the births of two children, my daughter returned to live with me. After fervent prayer in the church she has returned to God and has improved greatly. Sometimes the elders prayed with her every day.

“My husband is over 116 years old now and still lives quietly on the compound. [It was he who had greeted our prayer meeting there.] There are over thirty children and his herds have been scattered to provide marriages for the sons. The sons are now responsible for the old one’s support and other clan members bring him things.

“The other wives and I each have a small herd of cows. I milk eight cows. That provides me with the money I need for school fees and my family. I still have four school-age children at home; they help me in our large shamba that we use to grow our own food.

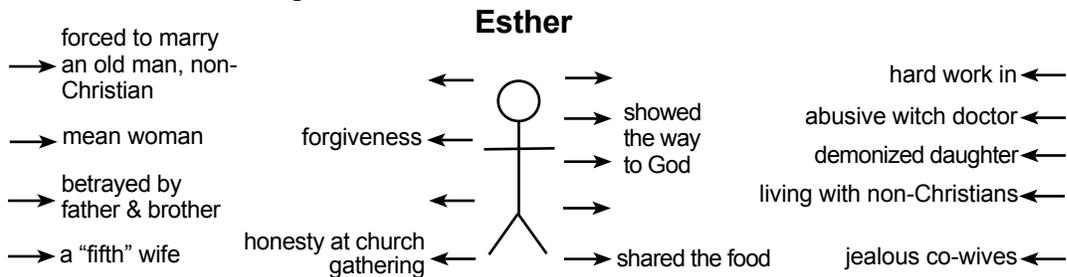
“I have good children. The boys don’t come to the church like the girls do. But they don’t drink and are good people. Boys are much harder to raise.

“We get many guests in our compound,” Esther said. “Sometimes people come to visit. My husband is the oldest man and elder of the Mkiroba tribe. He’s a living history book and knows all about the customs of long ago. I try to greet these guests with hospitality. I think about 1 Corinthians 13, my favorite Bible chapter.

“Faith, hope, love...and the greatest of these is love. This,” she said, “is the key. That is what has helped me live successfully in a difficult situation. Love.”



Draw: Esther deflecting evil from all sides



Teaching Tip:

A good extension of this lesson would be to give the group a list of verses (or for them to come up with a list) from the New Testament that underlie Esther’s response to suffering and write them in the margins of the story. Her spirituality is not rooted in good feelings, but in biblical revelation. Her devotion to Jesus is inseparable from her submission to the Word, which, in turn, informs her responses to evil.

Notes:

1. Mary Lou Cummings, *Surviving Without Romance: African Women Tell Their Stories* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press), pp. 132-138.