

"Police"

Micah 4: 1-5

John 18: 1-11

Grove Presbyterian Church

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If prostitution rates as the oldest profession, then the police must be the second oldest profession. They sort of go hand-in-hand. Misbehavior creates the need for correction. Keeping society in check.

Same as back at the time of Jesus. Roman soldiers patrolled Jesus's cities and neighborhoods, often accompanied by the Temple Police. Think of them as the Iranian security forces today, making sure with cudgel or imprisonment that due respect is given.

These Temple Police too were priests. Levites. Except they were in charge of religious law and order. They were the gate keepers at the Temple, checking against any unlawful admittance, They were the patrols, the police making sure the crowds in the courtyards behaved, the night watchmen. They would make arrests on behalf of the religious authorities, carried out the punishments.

We see these police officers several times in the Bible: here to arrest Jesus, later to arrest the Apostles, accompanying the District Attorney, Saul of Tarsus, as he's imprisoning those followers of Jesus for disrespecting the faith.

They did the dirty work of the religious authorities. After all, they were just doing their job.

Listen:

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus

said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

Suddenly you hear the police siren behind you.

Or you're driving fast along Route 80, round the bend, and there the cruiser waits; you tap your brakes and take a quick look in the rear view mirror.

Are you feeling guilty?

Is there's something about the police that make us uneasy, triggering some kind of excited guilt? Oh man, they finally got me.

Maybe that is why movies about thugs like Dillinger get all the juice and ticket sales?

*Bad boys, bad boys, what'cha gonna do?
Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?*

Maybe that is why we relish our action movies about rogue cops, like Dirty Harry: justice by .44 Magnum. When, when you think about it, Dirty Harry was no better than the guys he shot.

...ask yourself one question: "Do I feel lucky?" Well, do ya, punk?

Some of us remember the nostalgic day when Mr. Policeman was introduced to us in Elementary School as always our friend.

Lord, when did it get so complicated and mixed up?

A police officer comes into a room and can make the guests more uncomfortable than the preacher in a collar.

Got to be tough to be a cop. All those shirtless idiots to deal with. And the ones in silk ties. All those who think themselves above the law.

Then, getting spit on by sweet young ladies too drunk to stand up. The boredom of watching cars drive by on Route 54. Or hunting escaped bank robbers. Or accompanying Children and Youth caseworkers at 3 AM to arrest a child pornographer in downtown Danville. Or keeping track of the cars slowing down in front of our elementary schools. Or shooting scared cows running amuck at the intersection. Or first on the scene of bloody-smears and headless corpses from motorcycle accidents.

How easy it can be to get jaded. A steady diet of dirty work can poison you. They do our dirty work. They see daily the worse and stupidest of people. They see first hand all the ugly, inhuman, sad, stupid stuff that goes on behind the doors of our town, whether doors along Railroad Street or up at Whisper Hill.

Little wonder, doing so much of our dirty work, some get so frustrated, so jaded, that they start bending the law, or start bullying, or become mirrors of the crooks they deal with, or try to plant informants in places like the Gate House and then get vindictive when told that that would be wrong to do.

All jobs got their risks to the soul.

John Calvin, whose 500 birthday we celebrated Friday, was, among many other things, a realist about humanity. Judgment is healthy. Let's avoid confusing judgment with judgmentalism. We need to judge ideas, behaviors, deeds. John Calvin rejected the facile notion of categorizing people as good or evil. What he understood was how easily our goodness can be corrupted, distorted, dangerous. Humanity is far more complicated, ambiguous, and paradoxical. Calvinism always warns how our greatest evils are done always in the name of the greatest good. Like security and safety.

Somewhere Augustine compares man's will to a horse awaiting its rider's command..."If God sits astride it," he says, "then as a moderate and skilled rider, he guides it properly, spurs it if it is too slow, checks it if it too swift, restrains it if it is too rough or too wile, subdues it if it balks, and leads it into the right path..."

--John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II:IV:1

Calvin was no fool. Akin to Martin Luther, he realized "the world will not be ruled by a rosary." This reveals why Calvin had such a high regard for the purpose of government.

Yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote the general peace and tranquility.

--John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV:XX:2

Simply put: What the Holy Spirit cannot direct, magistrates will correct. And how do the magistrates, how does civil government, correct us? Who is their instrument?

Hello Mr. Policeman.

Where would society be without them? Our Peace officers. Our Law Enforcement officers. Keeping the peace. To serve and protect. Such a glamorous a life, right?

- Police officers
- State Troopers
- Custom officers
- Correction officers
- Probation officers
- Parole Officers
- Sheriffs
- Marshals
- Constables
- Deputies
- Security Guards
- Immigration Inspectors
- Custom Inspectors
- Border Patrols
- Fish and Game Wardens
- Secret Service Agents
- DEA agents
- ATF Agents
- FBI Agents
- NCIS Agents

They are the result of the difference between the inner locus of control versus outer locus of control. Why do we obey the law? Because of fear of being arrested by Special Agent Gibbs and prosecuted if we break the law? That's external locus. Control of our behavior from the outside. It's also how we raise our children until they attain the

maturity (if they ever do) of choosing the right for the sake of the right, the inner locus of control. That divine Jiminy Cricket warning my Pinocchio ways to avoid going with the fox and cat to Pleasure Island. Once there you tend to end up looking like a donkey.

We choose to stop at the traffic light not because of fear but because it is good to do. For others and ourselves.

And when we don't, when the self takes over?

Hello Mr. Policeman.

To serve and protect.

To keep me safe from society. Keeping society safe from myself. Keeping society safe from society. Keeping myself safe from myself.

A fair aim. I just want me and mine to be safe.

Which is maybe why all those home security systems that stroke our fears make so much money.

Why is it then that every human attempt to keep us safe only serves to imprison us further and intensify our fears, whether security systems in our homes, police checkpoints on Route 11, GPS secreted in our children's sneakers, or faster missiles? Homeland insecurity:

*They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little
temporary safety
deserve neither liberty or safety
--Benjamin Franklin (1759)*

Afraid to leave your house.

Afraid to fly.

Afraid to speak the truth.

Afraid to move someplace new.

Afraid to learn something true.

Afraid to let your children play outside.

When we are terrorized, that is when the terrorist win.

What frightens you?

The hitch is that our chief end in life is to be neither safe nor secure.

Didn't know Christians were supposed to worry about being safe? Safety never was a concern of Jesus'. He was more interested in being faithful.

So back to Jesus.

The cops are coming. It's an entire detachment of soldiers, temple police, torches, lanterns and weapons: swords and batons. Why torches and lamps? They were expecting him to hide.

But he wasn't hiding. He wasn't cringing in fear. He's praying. He is waiting for them. He's the only one among them unafraid.

What a force ! What a retinue! Could be hundreds. All for Jesus. Amazing how he frightened them. He steps forward and they fall to the ground in fear.

And yet, they the police, they called upon to do the dirty job that night, they who were just following orders, also are the first to get to see what kind of man Jesus is.