

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday in Lent, February 28, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 155, 159:1, 150, 152, 173.

Lessons: Isaiah 53:3-7, Revelation 20:11-13, Passion History Part 3*.

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:57-68.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Don't we get outraged when we hear of a miscarriage of justice? Don't we get angry when we hear of someone being unfairly accused of a crime, arrested, and found guilty by the authorities who should have treated him fairly, justly, and rightly?

Well, your blood should boil when you hear how

JESUS WAS FALSELY ACCUSED, MISTREATED
AND CONDEMNED BY THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

1. **They should have welcomed him as the Messiah.**
2. **They saw him as a usurper, as someone who was trying to steal their position of authority.**
3. **But this was all in accord with God's plans and prophecies.**

God had assigned the office of High Priest to Aaron, Moses' brother. According to the Old Testament, the high priest had to be someone descended from Aaron. He was the high priest for life under God's rules. By the time of Jesus, the Romans appointed a man as high priest, and Annas was appointed high priest from 6 A.D. to 15 A.D. when he was deposed. Yet he remained one of the nation's most influential individuals, considering that he had five sons and one son-in-law, Caiaphas, who were also appointed as high priests. Caiaphas was high priest at the time of Jesus' trial, from 18-36 A.D.

After Jews returned from exile in Babylon at the time of Ezra, the Babylonians permitted the Jews to have a ruling council, which became known as the Sanhedrin, or just the "Council". In Jesus' day this was 70 men, or 71 if you include the high priest appointed by the Romans. This was the most powerful religious and political body of the Jewish people. Though the Romans controlled the government, they gave the people power to handle religious disputes and some civil disputes. But a death sentence had to be handled by the Romans.

It was to this religious council that Jesus was taken, when he was captured and bound. Members of this group were included among the leaders who decided to get rid of Jesus. For example, Matthew reports Jesus telling his disciples: *"Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him."* Matthew 26:3-4 (KJV)

It was probably after midnight when Jesus was taken captive and then taken to the palace of the high priest. There was haste to complete the trial and have Jesus die before the Sabbath. So they worked first at night, instead of waiting for daylight and meeting at the temple. They probably also made attempts at night to contact as many members of the Sanhedrin, the Council, as possible so that they could deal with Jesus in a way that would perhaps appear to be just and fair and appear to obey the letter of the law.

This trial before the religious authorities had two phases. First, at night, they took him to Annas, who was father-in-law to the current high priest, but still had some power. *"The detachment of soldiers with its*

commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.” John 18:12-13 (NIV)

Then *“At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them.”* Luke 22:66 (NIV)

If Annas and Caiaphas and the Council could find some kind of political intrigue in Jesus, the Romans would get involved without delay and their chances of getting Jesus out of the way increased greatly. If it could be shown that Jesus was a menace to the government, it would be a simple matter to get rid of Jesus. But that didn't work. So they tried to find something wrong with his doctrine so they would have some religious grounds to get rid of Jesus.

At this trial they tried to find witnesses who would distort some of Jesus' teachings and give them some grounds for condemning him. *“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ‘We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’” Yet even then their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’”* Mark 14:55-61 (NIV)

The trial was “fixed”. They had already decided to kill Jesus. All they had to do was find some kind of evidence which agreed with their goals and conclusions. Finally they found two witnesses who made reference to the time when Jesus said *“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”* John 2:19 (NIV) Jesus was referring to his body, which for all humans is a temple of God. The religious leaders were about to destroy the body of Jesus and three days later he would restore it to life. But Jesus had never taught one thing in public and another, contradictory thing in private. Jesus just didn't answer anything to the accusations.

We see here in Jesus' behavior a fulfillment of the words from Isaiah: *“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”* Isaiah 53:7 (NIV)

“Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’ They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guards took him and beat him.” Mark 14:60-65 (NIV)

Jesus remained silent until the high priest asks if he is *“the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”* Mark 14:61 (NIV) Here is an opportunity for Jesus to answer to an accusation that is really the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Giving us an example to speak up when the truth of the Word of God is at stake, he answers boldly. *“I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”* Mark 14:62 (NIV)

Then the high priest dramatically accused Jesus of blasphemy, hoping the rest would remember the words from Leviticus: *“Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him.”* Leviticus 24:14 (NIV)

They refused to think that Jesus' words might be true. But we know that he will be sitting at the right hand of God coming to judge the living and the dead, as we read in Psalm 110: *“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”* Psalm 110:1 (NIV)

Then they all condemned him as deserving death. They spit on him, a terribly degrading action. Then they began to mock him outrageously, blindfolding him, and beating him with their fists. Their mockery built on his claim that he was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. If he were truly the Son of God, he should be able to

know – blindfolded – who is hitting him. And after the leaders were mocking and hitting him, the guards also joined in beating him. This, of course, wasn't the worst of the beatings he endured, as we shall hear next week.

So at this trial, Jesus was falsely accused, mistreated and condemned. Injustice? Yes. But it was just the beginning of the end of his terrible sufferings and death. His heavenly Father lets us see Jesus' obedience and his disgrace. Justice would have been to have every human suffer and pay the price for his or her own sins.

In recent decades, Christian lawyers have examined the trials of Jesus – this one and the one before Pontius Pilate which we will talk about next week – and concluded that his trial was completely unjust and unfair according to all the laws – religious and secular – which were in effect at that time.

But we know why it was done. God's Word is clear: ***"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*** Romans 4:25 (NIV)

And where were his followers? Where were his disciples? Just as he had warned them in the upper room, they had abandoned him. They had fled when he was taken prisoner in the garden. Matthew writes ***"But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."*** Matthew 26:56 (NIV)

Yet there were two disciples, Peter and John, who really thought that they had to see what was happening to Jesus. John's Gospel tells us ***"Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in."*** John 18:15-16 (NIV)

And you know how that turned out. Peter, who with John and all the disciples had abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, ended up denying three times that he even knew Jesus!

And what about us? Where would we have been during all this? Surely we would have fled and hidden somewhere when Jesus was on trial for his life. Surely we would have been more concerned about our own lives than about what would happen to Jesus, our Master.

And we are most certainly included in those upon whom the blood of Jesus rests – in two ways! We would be guilty of sinning which caused the death of Jesus and we would also be among all mankind who would have the forgiving blood of Jesus sprinkled upon us.

Jesus told the truth and was condemned. That continues. The world still attacks and condemns the truth of God's Word today.

They rejected him. This is the way it had to be to redeem us – and all mankind.

But this isn't the end of Jesus' suffering and trials. Next Sunday we go to the trial in front of Pontius Pilate.

He did all this for us – for you and for me. Thanks be to God that he did all this! Amen.

* For the text of The Passion History, go to the [Weekly Sermons](http://www.lutheranlccf.org) page of the LCCF Website, www.lutheranlccf.org