

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 6, 2016**

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

Hymns: 143:1-5, 159:1-2, 156, 151:1-4, 145.

Lessons: Psalm 16:5-11, Romans 3:21-26, the Passion History, Part 4\*

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:1-2 and Matthew 27:11-31.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

***“Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death.”*** These same people had taken him prisoner in the darkness of the night. They had dragged him, tied up, to a hearing and trial at night in front of the religious leaders of the Jews. But they needed the authority of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, to put him to death. Matthew tells us ***“Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, ‘Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?’ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge – to the great amazement of the governor.”*** We have here another 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)

Today we find

**JESUS ON TRIAL IN FRONT OF PONTIUS PILATE**

- 1. The religious leaders of the Jews insisted he must be executed.**
- 2. Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but**
- 3. He finally handed Jesus over to be crucified.**

From the following words, we know that from the beginning Pilate was trying to get out from under this problem and trying to set Jesus free. ***“Now it was the governor’s custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, ‘Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.”***

The leaders of the Jews wanted Jesus dead. But Pilate tries to find a way to release Jesus. From Scripture, we don’t know any more about this custom, but Pilate gives the crowd a choice. Mark tells us more about Barabbas: ***“A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.”*** Mark 15:7 (NIV)

Now if you had a choice between having a notorious prisoner, – a murder and a revolutionary, a terrorist, a mobster, a gangster – or Jesus, a man who healed people miraculously, whom would you want walking around your city and neighborhood? I think we’d probably want ‘the good guy’.

***“But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. ‘Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’ asked the governor. ‘Barabbas,’ they answered. ‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?’ Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’ ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’”***

John tells us that Pilate’s final appeal was to present Jesus as their king: ***“‘Here is your king,’ Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, ‘Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!’ ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ Pilate asked. ‘We have no king but Caesar,’ the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him***

***over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.***” John 19:14-16 (NIV) In this way the Jews, whom God had chosen to be his people, were declaring their allegiance to an earthly king instead of to the true God and his only-begotten Son.

Mob psychology took over. The religious leaders persuaded the crowd to have Jesus killed by crucifixion. Human nature being what it is – sinful – no one likes to go against the crowd.

It is easy for each of us to wonder how we would stand up to persecution when faced with death because I am a Christian. Would I continue to confess Christ with the alternative to be persecuted, killed, perhaps even to be beheaded because I am a Christian? We think, ‘Sure, I would confess Christ.’ But in the face of what Peter and all the apostles did, would I?

In our confirmation vows we promised to “intend to continue firm and strong in the confession of this church, and suffer everything, even death, rather than fall away from it.” We also promised “to be diligent in the use of the means of grace, and to live in such a way as to honor the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death.”

But how many other things come before God and his Word in our lives? (Pause here) Sports? Entertainment? Recreation? Extra vacation time? “I just don’t feel like it?” “There’s so much else I want to do.”

How would we do when faced with the choice of death or Christ when our sinful flesh wants to make the wrong decision in all sorts of other matters that aren’t life or death situations? We surely must pray for strength, the strength to stand up against Satan and all his allies.

What happened at this trial was all part of God’s plan for Jesus. This is the way God planned and carried out our salvation.

We read that even Pilate’s wife sends him a warning. ***“While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.’”*** This probably reinforced Pilate’s desire to wash his hands of the whole matter. In fact, ***“When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’”*** Those are some words you won’t hear in some churches when this Bible History is read. Many churches decades ago decided not to read these Words of God because it allegedly shows anti-semitism. Many Jewish leaders feel that these words show hatred for Jews when we repeat the inspired Word of God: ***“Let his blood be on us and on our children!”***

The Jews here who said this are saying “we’ll take responsibility for his death.” But did the simple act of washing his hands – and making a big show of it – really absolve Pilate of the sin of sending Christ to his crucifixion? Of course not. True absolution comes only from Christ and his representatives, when the penitent sinner believes and accepts the forgiveness of sins from the spoken Word of God or from the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

But we have to ask this question: when the Jews said this, did it mean that they and they alone were the only ones responsible for the death of Jesus? Of course not. All humans – us too – are guilty of sending Jesus to the cross because of our sins. No one is excluded, for ***“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** Romans 3:22-23 (NIV)

And if we accept that, we too – yes, we who are sitting in this room today – and all mankind have the blood of Jesus on our hands and on our consciences. Our sins caused Jesus’ suffering and death.

But in another sense, the blood of Jesus is sprinkled upon the Jews, and upon us, and upon all mankind for the forgiveness of sins. We are “washed in the blood of the lamb”. The Jews would be familiar with this picture from the Old Testament sacrifices the priests made. But that is not the sense in which they first made this statement. Pilate was trying to wash his hands of the whole matter, and claim no responsibility in the death of Jesus and they admitted that they would take responsibility for the death of Jesus.

And we must also admit that the blood of Jesus is on us and our children. Once in shame, the shame that our sins caused his death, and again in joy, that his blood gives us forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

***“Then [Pilate] released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”*** Pilate gives in to the people. He takes what he thinks is the easy road out. He swaps the death of an innocent man for the freedom of one who was abundantly guilty, Barabbas.

And isn't that also a picture of how the justification of God works? God punished his holy, innocent Son so that we, unholy, guilty ones, may go free. Believe that truth and salvation is yours!

But Pilate had to show his power and not totally give up all control in the crucifixion of Jesus. He had Jesus flogged, also called scourged, before he handed him over to be crucified.

Flogging or scourging in itself was a terrible punishment. This beating was administered to a man typically tied to a post, with a whip that had bits of sharp metal, or sharp pieces of bone or glass embedded in the leather strips. Men have died from such flogging alone, without crucifixion added to that flogging. More pain and agony for Jesus. More blood. More suffering. But we must remember, to our shame; that this was done to set us free from our sins, from eternal damnation and eternal death.

Luke reports that at some point in Jesus' trial before Pilate, he was dragged off to Herod, whom the Romans had permitted to serve as king of Galilee. ***“When [Pilate] learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies.”*** Luke 23:7-12 (NIV) Even in front of Herod Jesus gave no answer. Here, too, we see another picture of the Lamb of God being led to the slaughter without complaint.

Just before Jesus was led away to be crucified, we read from Matthew: ***“Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”***

The soldiers obviously had heard the conversations between Pilate and Jesus about Jesus being a king, so they mocked him in this way, too. They humiliated Jesus even more. They mockingly praised him as King of the Jews. They inflicted even more pain on him.

Then when they were done, ***“they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”***

The trials are done. Then, finally, Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, to be executed on a cross. Oh, the injustice of it all! But look at why it happened: ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) But for that act of crucifixion of the sinless Son of God we are eternally grateful. It is because of that that our sins are forgiven and heaven is opened for us! 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](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)