

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Lent, February 25, 2018

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

Hymns: 142, 143:1, 141, 144, 145.

Lessons: Exodus 23:1-2, Philippians 2:1-8, Mark 14:53-65 (NIV)

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:57-68 (NIV)

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

After Jesus was captured in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was dragged, bound like the prisoner he was, to the high priest and the council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin.

Previously Jesus had warned Peter, predicting that he – and all the disciples – would flee, and that he, Peter, would deny Jesus Christ three times this very night.

He had suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He was arrested and captured by a large mob following Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus with a kiss, a sign of love, given hypocritically. The leaders of the Jews together with armed soldiers and guards took him prisoner.

Now we read of

JESUS' TRIAL BEFORE THE JEWS

- 1. The leaders of the Jews accused and questioned him.**
- 2. Jesus did not defend himself, for**
- 3. He knew how this trial would end.**

The Jews tried to bring all their religious leaders together to condemn Jesus. Even though this is the middle of the night, which was strictly not legal, they did it anyway. *“Then 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.”*

God had instructed that the high priest should have the job for life. But under Roman rule, this had been changed so that the Romans appointed the Jewish high priest. Although Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was technically the high priest according to Roman decree, Annas had enough influence to really condemn Jesus, although this trial would not be considered the final judgment from the Jews. It is as if the leaders of the Jews are just trying to build their case against Jesus. This was also an opportunity to have time to gather the members of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, together to meet in front of Caiaphas.

John reports the following events occurred in front of Annas. The other evangelists also record these kinds of things also happening in front of Caiaphas. *“The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ‘I have spoken openly to the world,’ Jesus replied. ‘I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.’ When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. ‘Is this the way you answer the high priest?’ he demanded. ‘If I said something wrong,’ Jesus replied, ‘testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?’ Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.”*

The high priest was the spiritual leader of the Jews and we shall see that he led them to demand the death of Jesus. He was trying to find something in Jesus' words with which to condemn him

Jesus is a remarkable example – remember that he was sinless – in saying the same things in public as he said in private. Haven't we all seen such hypocrisy? People – even Christians – fall into the sin of treating different people differently and saying one thing to some people and behaving differently around other people. Yet out of Christian love and obedience to God, we Christians should really treat all people the same.

Jesus tells the high priest to ask the people who heard him preach what he said. But one of the officials thinks his comments are disrespectful and evil and hits him. 'Tell me what I did wrong' Jesus says. 'But if I was speaking truthfully, why did you hit me?'

We read that ***"The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, 'Prophecy! Who hit you?' And they said many other insulting things to him. 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."*** It was now dawn. Jesus had been held prisoner all night and then we read that ***"those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled."*** Scripture says they ***"took him into the house of the high priest."*** At the very least, this would be most irregular. Trials should not have been conducted at someone's house, even if he were the high priest.

"Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people." John makes reference to a previous statement of Caiaphas that instead of the whole Jewish nation perishing, they should execute the one great trouble-maker, Jesus.

Because there was no good, solid evidence that Jesus was doing anything wrong, we read that ***"The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, 'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days." ... Yet even then their testimony did not agree."*** Witnesses were gathered. But because they were false witnesses, their testimony did not turn out to be valid. But the Jews kept trying to find some witnesses who could support their trumped-up accusations against Jesus.

The Old Testament makes very clear that any such testimony had to be exactly word-for-word if two witnesses were to try to agree in such a trial against someone. So in this way, they are at least trying to keep up the appearance of conducting a proper, legal trial.

"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." Although there are many Old Testament prophecies which Jesus fulfilled on this night we are not going to quote very many of them. But here we see the fulfillment again of the words of 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)

The high priest and the leaders of the Jews continued to question him, seeking some kind of answer so that they would have some evidence against him. If no witnesses could be found to condemn Jesus, Caiaphas and the leaders of the Jews then tried questioning Jesus directly.

"'If you are the Christ,' they said, 'tell us.' Jesus answered, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.'" "Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.'" "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.'" "They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?' He replied, 'You are right in saying I am.'" "But I say to all of you: In the future 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?' "Then they said, 'Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.' They all condemned him as worthy of death."

Here we have the sworn testimony of Jesus himself that he really, truly, is the Son of God. Jesus' enemies conclude that he is guilty. In their opinion, his own words of truth condemn him. He makes a powerful

confession about his coming in judgment over all mankind. Of course, the leaders of the Jews thought this was something only God could do, and here was a man, a prophet from Galilee making such a wild claim, and they were convinced it was a blasphemous claim. Only God could make such a claim. And they surely did not believe he was God or the Messiah, so for this alleged blasphemy they condemn him to death.

“Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’ ‘He is worthy of death,’ they answered.”

In his anger and frustration, the high priest tore his clothes! This was an expression of anger and he was angry because this man had – at least in his mind – mocked God. The high priest and those with him did not in any way regard Jesus as the Son of God.

Blasphemy! Blasphemy is contemptuous, profane, mocking irreverence toward God. It is sacrilege, desecration, and speaking evil of God.

This is their judgment. They condemn him for his own preaching. He did not respond to the false accusations. But he speaks truth, and is condemned for it.

Matthew and Mark report that the beatings and mockery continued after they pronounced Jesus guilty. ***“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.” “Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, ‘Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?’”***

Mockery! Spitting on him, which among the Jews was a terrible injustice. And this wouldn’t be the last of it. It would only get worse, especially on the cross.

They are mocking and taunting him. If he is blindfolded he couldn’t see who was hitting him. But if he was really the Son of God, he could know who was hitting him. But there is no record of any response, which confirms again ***“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.”*** Isaiah 53:7 (NIV)

Oh, the unfairness of it all! In recent decades, lawyers in the United States have examined the trials of Jesus and determined that they were totally illegal and improper under both Jewish and Roman laws. As just one example, Jesus’ trials were started at night, which was completely contrary to Jewish laws.

But this trial was not the end of Jesus’ troubles. The leaders of the Jews had condemned Jesus to death according to their laws, At least they claimed and pretended to do so. But they had to get the approval of the civil government, in the person of Pontius Pilate in order to put Jesus to death. That we will talk about next Sunday.

So it was for us that Jesus was put on trial in front of the Jewish leaders. It was for us that Jesus was falsely accused. It was for us that Jesus was mocked. It was for us that he was found guilty – falsely. He suffered all this – and more – even the torments of hell – for us, in our place!

But there was no sin in him.

But this was the Lord’s way. He suffered for us, in our place so that we might, by faith in him, be spared such punishment and worse. He redeemed us from eternal damnation. This was his chief purpose in coming to earth. And how is this gift made ours? By believing! For this we thank God! May the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ assure us of our hope of eternal life, a gift from God which is received by faith! Amen.