

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday In Lent, March 10, 2024

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

Hymns: 155, 44:1-2, 148:1-5, 253:1-4, 151:1

Lessons: Psalm 36, Rom. 3:19-26, John 18:28-37.

Sermon Text: Matt. 27:1-2, and 11-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We could find many, many lessons from the events of the last 24 hours of Jesus' life. In our few sermons in the Lenten season, we have had to be quite selective with our sermon texts. Last Sunday you heard about Jesus being captured in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was then led away to Caiaphas, the high priest, and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. ***“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.”***

He was bound like a common prisoner. What his captors didn't know was that no one would come to save or rescue him. This fulfilled the words of Isaiah. ***“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 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 53:6-7, NIV84)

In this trial in front of the leaders of the Jews, false witnesses testified against him. ***“But they did not find any [evidence to put Jesus to death,] 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.’”*** But even their testimony did not agree, word-for-word, as Jewish law required.

“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.’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied. ‘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.’ 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. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, ‘Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?’” (Matthew 26:63-68, NIV84)

He was condemned to death. They mocked him. They beat him.

While he was there, Peter shamefully denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

All this happened the same night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. It really took all night, until the rooster crowed. He was formally condemned to death by the elders and chief priests. But they didn't have the power under the Roman government to put Jesus to death. That required the judgement and approval of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Today we zero in on just one aspect of the trials of Jesus, the trial before Pilate. ***“Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.”*** (Matthew 27:1-2, NIV84) Today we see

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

1. He knew he had to die.
2. He knew he had to die for the sins he was accused of, although he was innocent.
3. He knew he had to die for all the sins of mankind.

This is the first time he was delivered to Pilate. After questioning Jesus, Pilate sent him to Herod, and Herod later sent him back to Pilate.

It was at this time, after Jesus had been sent to Pilate, that Judas would have gone back to the high priests and tried to give back the money he received for betraying Jesus. But they told him that whatever he thought, that was his problem, although they were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the Jews. He saw no hope. Although he had heard Jesus many times forgive sins, he didn't believe that Jesus could forgive his terrible sins. And he committed suicide. But Jesus can forgive sins – any sin. Judas was no doubt really sorry for his sin of handing Jesus over to the chief priests, but he didn't have faith in the forgiveness of sins. So he sealed his eternal fate by killing himself and sending himself to hell.

John tells us much more: ***“Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, ‘What charges are you bringing against this man?’ ‘If he were not a criminal,’ they replied, ‘we would not have handed him over to you.’ Pilate said, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.’ ‘But we have no right to execute anyone,’ the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled. Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’ ‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’ Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.’ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’ ‘What is truth?’ Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, ‘I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews’?’ They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.’*** (John 18:28–40, NIV84)

Notice that the Jews were concerned about outward traditions and customs instead of a human life. They were concerned about how they could appear like good, righteous people to their countrymen. They tell Pilate that they wouldn't bother him if Jesus weren't a criminal deserving death. According to the law of Moses, Jesus should be stoned to death as a blasphemer. We read in Leviticus chapter 24 ***“Then the Lord said to Moses: ‘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. Say to the Israelites: ‘If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.’”*** (Leviticus 24:13–16, NIV84)

But Jesus would not die by being buried under a pile of stones. He'd be hung up, suspended on a cross, so that people could see his suffering. He could say in the words of Jeremiah ***“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?”*** (Lamentations 1:12, NIV84) This was the exact opposite of what the chief priests wanted. They did not want to kill him publicly during the Passover festival. They wanted a private execution. But it didn't happen that way.

When Pilate interviews him, he asks if Jesus is a king. If Jesus claimed to be an earthly king, that might be grounds for the Roman government to accuse him of sedition, or rebellion, or wanting to overthrow the government. Then the Roman government would have occasion to try him.

But Jesus makes it very clear that his kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. He rules in the hearts of believers here on earth, and totally in heaven.

Then comes Pilate's great question, ***“what is truth?”***, but this is really a rhetorical question. He doesn't really want an answer.

We are living in a country in which we have been told that there are “alternate truths” which contradict real facts and real truth. But as God's children who study the Scriptures, we know what truth is and where to find it – in the Holy Scriptures. One of the greatest truths of all time is that all men are sinners and deserve eternal punishment from God. God's Law plainly shows that. But the other of the greatest truths of all time is that ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”*** (1 Timothy 1:15, NIV84) That is the truth upon which we stake our lives. We read in First Corinthians 15: ***“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those***

also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” (1 Corinthians 15:17–19, NIV84)

Pilate found no reason to put him to death. In fact he found no guilt in Jesus at all. He tells the Jews *“You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him.”* (Luke 23:13–14, NIV84)

So Pilate had the opportunity to set Jesus free. But he didn’t.

“As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw [Jesus], they shouted, ‘Crucify! Crucify!’ But Pilate answered, ‘You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.’ The Jews insisted, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.’ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. ‘Where do you come from?’ he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ‘Do you refuse to speak to me?’ Pilate said. ‘Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?’ Jesus answered, ‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.’ From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, ‘If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.’”

“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. 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.’ 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!’ 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!’ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.” (Matthew 27:15–27, NIV84)

“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!’” (Matthew 27:24–25, NIV84)

Those are words we repeat because that is what Scripture says. But we know that the Jews are not the only humans who have Jesus’ blood upon them. *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23, NIV84) All people, regardless of who they are or where they live or what their ancestry is are guilty of sending Jesus to the cross. It is our sins that are responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

We must recognize and admit that we, too, are responsible for Jesus’ terrible death, and not only the Jews who physically crucified him. Even though *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ...[all] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”*

Most importantly, we have been given the glorious, beautiful truth, the results of all Jesus’ suffering. Jesus died so that we might live. Jesus suffered so that we might not suffer eternally in hell. Thanks be to God for this wonderful gift! Amen.