

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Quinquagesima, the Last Sunday in Epiphany, February 19, 2012

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

Hymns: 151:1-4, 150:1, 149, 145, 173.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Acts 2:22-38, Matthew 20:17-19.

Sermon Text: Luke 18:31-34

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Imagine how you would feel if someone close to you started telling you dire, terrible things that were going to happen to him or to her. As humans listening to another human, we would probably want to tell that person ‘no way will all those terrible things happen to you. What makes you imagine such things?’ Our reaction would be ‘oh, those things won’t happen. Look on the bright side of things. Why are you being so negative? Most of the bad things we worry about don’t ever happen. Don’t be so pessimistic.’ In addition, we might be worried about the mental health of that person, wondering if he or she had some problems about thinking terrible things would happen, or if that person were terribly depressed and needs some help.

But Jesus tells his disciples that terrible things will happen to him. They had heard these things before. Perhaps they remember the second time it was recorded in Matthew, when Peter objected to Jesus saying such things, and Jesus had – can we say ‘blown up at Peter’. At that time Jesus even called Peter a devil! Again today we hear that

JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES WHAT IS COMING.

1. **He will be betrayed and condemned to death and crucified, “and the third day he shall rise again.”**
2. **They didn’t understand.**
3. **We know ‘the rest of the story’.**

Luke has recorded this three times previously. We read in Luke 9:18-22 *"Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God.’ Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’"* He told them to tell no one because the time was not yet come that this part of his work should be revealed.

The second time Luke records this was after his transfiguration on the mountain, when he had been strengthened by his heavenly Father for what he was about to endure: *"‘Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.’ But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it."* Luke 9:44-45

For the third instance in Luke, Jesus kind of slipped this statement into a discussion of the kingdom of God and judgment day: *"But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."* Luke 17:25

"Now [we read] as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!’"

This is exactly what will happen. But in none of those previous predictions did he tell them that all this was going to happen in Jerusalem. It is as if he has been revealing the terrible things that were about to happen to him little-by-little, revealing only as much as they could handle. Sometimes we share bad news just a little at a time, and don't really reveal the whole story, thinking that others will be terribly upset by all the details about what is going on. But we are only human, and cannot predict exactly what is going to happen.

He and they were going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and, it turns out, to experience much, much, more. They were literally going up. Jericho was about 15 miles to the East-North-East of Jerusalem, and it was a long walk up a hill toward the city and the temple set on a mountain top. Every step of the way from Jericho to Jerusalem Jesus knew what was facing him. Can you imagine – or perhaps you have been in that situation: walking up somewhere and you know that something bad is awaiting you? Think of perhaps walking up the steps of the courthouse knowing you have a trial awaiting you – and you know your chances aren't good. I think that we would surely be filled with a great sense of dread. Now Jesus was human after all, although he was not "only human". But he has the greatest suffering any human has ever known facing him.

But for us his suffering is good. We will be let off. We won't have to suffer in hell because he suffered it all for us – and it is going to happen soon. He knows what the result will be for him. He must undergo great suffering and a horrible death. But he also knows that he will rise from the dead. We also know what the result will be for us. The result for us will also be eternal life, although any and all sufferings we must bear on earth are nowhere near what he had facing him.

It was bad for Jesus.

He says ***"the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law."*** WE know what that word ***'betrayed'*** means. It means that someone will be a traitor. We have the advantage that all of scripture, ***"everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*** Romans 15:4 We know how this history is going to end. But his disciples didn't really know. They hear the words but they didn't comprehend what was going to happen. The meaning is hidden to them. They didn't understand. In fact, it was only after his resurrection that Jesus ***"opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."*** Luke 24:45

His own people, the Jews, and in fact the religious leaders of his people, ***"the chief priests and the teachers of the law"*** are the ones who ***"will condemn him to death."*** The very people – the ones who should have been leading the people by teaching the truths of Scripture – would be taking the wrong steps and leading the people astray into condemning him. The very ones who were claiming and pretending to teach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of God's pure Word would lead the people into executing the one sent to save them from their sins. He was the promised Messiah, but even the leaders did not know the truth of God's Word any more. For so many generations they had been led astray and been repeating the teachings of men instead of looking directly into the Word of God – in their case the Old Testament – that they would condemn to death the only one who could save them – and all mankind – eternally. In the beginning, it may have been just a little bit of false doctrine slipped into their teachings – for whatever reason – but false doctrine and ignoring what God said had so overtaken their visible church that they could no longer see the truth. They would condemn him to death in trying to save their position of leadership over the religious lives of the Jewish people.

But not only would they condemn him to death according to their laws, but they ***"will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified."*** The spiritual 'leaders' of the Jewish people had no right to put anyone to death. They would have to have the support of the secular government, the Romans, Gentiles, to carry out their punishment. In this way they might even think that they were innocent of the blood of Jesus. After all, someone else would have the final say about the fact that Jesus would be scornfully surrounded and cruelly beaten, and put to death as a common criminal, really, as the worst of criminals. So in a sense they could claim that they were technically innocent of the blood of this innocent man. But Pilate found no fault in him, and tried to wash his hands of the whole matter, literally washing his hands in a futile gesture. Then we read in Matthew 27:25 that the Jews told Pilate, the Gentile governor, the one who had the authority to put a criminal to death ***"Let his blood be on us and on our children!"***

Pilate would find no fault in Jesus, especially not enough fault to put him to death, and he tried to wash his hands of the entire matter. The Jews responded to that by saying ***"Let his blood be on us and on our children!"*** Supposedly Pope Benedict XVI has written a book which completely exonerates the Jewish people for that statement. Such a pronouncement from one that the entire world looks to or considers a leader of Christianity supposedly will carry a lot of weight in the world, and will completely rewrite Scripture and history. Pope Benedict is, after all, as one news report put it, "a theologian" who should know what he is writing about. But we know what the Scriptures really say. The Jews physically crucified Jesus. But we dare never forget that every human being – us too – is responsible for the death of Jesus. Every sin we commit says again ***"his blood be upon us and our children"***.

Jesus plainly knew exactly what would happen to him, all the details.

But they – his disciples – didn't understand. They could not comprehend. But would we have understood all this before the event, especially if our religious teachers had spoken of the Messiah as setting up an earthly kingdom?

But by the grace of God we understand. We can see the whole picture. They could have, too, if they'd listened – really listened to Jesus. If they'd paid attention. If they knew the Scriptures. We KNOW because we have learned. Not everyone has learned. It is like a movie we have seen before – perhaps many times. We know how it will end. We may even know some of the key lines in the movie. It is like a book we have read before. We may even have some favorite lines memorized. Of course, what we memorize of the books or the movies are usually just the good parts, not the bad parts.

It was bad for Jesus. But it is good for us.

They didn't understand. How often don't we misunderstand or just not understand what Jesus is saying in his Word? The devil tries so hard to make us misunderstand. But we – every one of us who can read and is learning to read – have a bible we can read, and understand the language. We don't have to rely on others to tell us what the characters on the pages mean. But we must plainly search the scriptures, and not rely merely on religious leaders – such as people rely on Pope Benedict – to tell us what the Scriptures mean. We are to search the scriptures. We ***"diligently study the Scriptures because [Jesus says,] you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me."*** John 5:39

Remember what is going to happen to him, just as he said:

1. Judas, one of his closest disciples will contract with the chief priests to betray Jesus' life for money.
2. He will be betrayed to the chief priest and teachers of the law – the ones you would think would protect and look for fulfillment of the Law and the prophets.
3. His own people will condemn him to death.
4. He will be handed over to Gentiles to be mocked and flogged.
5. He will be crucified.
6. And the joyous part of it, on the third day he will be raised to life.

All this will happen just as he prophesied it.

This will be the heart of our message in the next seven weeks, the 40 plus days of the Lenten season.

Through it all, we dare not forget the last words Jesus says in our text: ***"and the third day he shall rise again."*** That is the glorious end of all the terrible things that will happen to Jesus. And you know why he must rise again. He will do that to prove his victory over death and the devil and the power of sin. He will rise again to prove that he can and will give eternal life to all who believe in him. Lord Jesus, thank you for doing all this for us. Amen.