

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Midweek Lent #2 -- March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **Mark 14:60-65**

**<sup>60</sup>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?” <sup>61</sup>But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.**

**Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”**

**<sup>62</sup>“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.”**

**<sup>63</sup>The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. <sup>64</sup>“You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”**

**They all condemned him as worthy of death. <sup>65</sup>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.**

Dear Followers of our Lord and Savior,

Does anyone know who Edward John Smith is? I have to admit that I didn't know who he was until I did a little bit of searching. Edward John Smith was the captain of the Titanic. He is the man who made all the decisions that horrible night of April 14, 1912. He was the one who was the highest captain who got to take all of the new and big ships out on their maiden voyages. He was the one that all of the other captains for his company had to report to. He was the one that didn't quite make the best decisions that night as he ignored other ships that had reported icebergs in the shipping lanes and who didn't slow down the ship even though things were getting dangerous. In fact Captain Smith was sleeping at the moment that the Titanic hit that iceberg only to be woken up to find out that the Titanic was in some serious trouble. We don't know too much about Captain Smith's decisions that horrible night, but we do know that he ended up making some poor decisions which cost many people their lives and also cost him his life.

Sadly enough, each of us is like Captain Smith. We are making decisions every day, but we don't always think through these decisions and how things will work out in the end. We don't always listen to the true authority of our Heavenly Father. We think that we are in charge and no one can tell us where to go and what to do. We think that no one else is in charge of our soul.

Caiaphas, the high priest of the Jewish nation, and the members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel, probably had not spent much actual time on the deck of any ship. But they also thought of themselves as great navigators, nonetheless. It was their task to keep their people safe and from the evil Roman Empire. This was no small challenge! It would take all the intelligence and all the wisdom they had to keep little Judea from being swallowed up and disappearing beneath the waves of this large nation, as had happened to so many other nations. But they were accomplishing it, and they were proud of themselves for it.

And in all of that they forgot who the true master of Israel was and condemned him to death when he came before them. And although we might never have gone along with this great crime, we still are tempted by the same pride and arrogance that led Caiaphas and the others. And so we must pray:

### **Theme: Forgive Our Desire To Defy Your Divine Authority**

- 1. At times we chafe under your commandments**
- 2. Father teach us, for Jesus' sake, to submit to your authority**

Let me tell you how the high priest of the Jewish nation got to be the high priest of the Jewish nation in the days of Jesus. It took political skills. The Romans, when they had conquered the country, had decided that such a high office as the high priesthood was not something they wanted out of their control. So the governor of the province was the man who would decide how to fill the office, and he had one overriding

concern about candidates: make sure it is someone who can keep the peace and keep the taxes coming in.

Caiaphas' family members would end up in the office of the high priesthood for about one hundred years because they knew how to "play the game." Caiaphas knew how to spot and exploit the slightest weakness in the Roman governor's position. He knew how to keep the streets of Jerusalem relatively peaceful. He enjoyed all the perks of the position, which might have included some fancy houses and other extra perks. And he gladly used the power of the high priesthood and would allow no one to take it away.

But Jesus of Nazareth was a thorn in his side. Jesus traveled throughout Israel preaching and teaching, which would have been all right except for one problem: He kept on talking about the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy and false teachings. Jesus was saying that the priesthood had abandoned the pure laws of God and had substituted them with the traditions and foolishness of man-made laws and opinions. And Jesus kept performing all these miracles and getting everybody all worked up about himself. Every wonderful thing he said and did made him look better to the people and the priests look worse. See, this is getting us nowhere, some of the higher-ups had complained. Look how the whole world has gone after him.

So the high priest and his council, the Sanhedrin, had to go to work. They had to do something to lessen the influence of this man from Galilee. They sent out their "people" to trap him in any misstatement and ruin his popularity with the people. That failed again and again. They confronted him directly on the day he rode into town with palm branches all over the road. But Jesus wouldn't back down.

So they plotted his death. They bribed one of his disciples to betray him to them for 30 pieces of silver. They held a fake and staged trial and condemned him. They brought him to the Roman governor and demanded that the governor execute him. And when Pontius Pilate set up a sign on his cross to show what crime he was dying for, the priests protested loudly, but to no avail. What an insult for Pilate to write "The King of the Jews" above the head of the man they had utterly rejected. Not him! They would not have him rule over them! They would have nothing to do with his "authority"!

And that was the trouble right there. They didn't want to yield the control they had over Israel. They didn't want to yield their power to any Messiah. While the rest of the people of Israel were delirious at the thought of their heavenly King coming to them, the high priest and his followers could imagine no worse disaster for themselves. They were like the enemies of the Lord's anointed in the second Psalm: "'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters'" (verse 3). They were the captains of the ship of Israel, and they didn't want any other captains!

Outwardly there is no one here tonight who would take the side of those horrible leaders. You see, that is the horrible thing about sin and temptation: It never shows itself as it really is, not in ourselves. We can see it clearly in others. We can see it in Caiaphas and in the Sanhedrin. But can we see it when it rears up in our own hearts? Is there not at times a feeling that Christ's authority is too much of a burden for us? His laws are not always what we want to do, after all. Our sinful flesh sometimes rears its ugly head at the idea that we don't get to call all the shots for our own lives. There are times when those commandments of his are more than we feel like bearing. And then we look for ways around them, ways to cut a few corners, ways to find some special circumstances that will allow us to ignore the clear laws of our God.

Yes, we must all admit that there are times when we defy the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and turn to sins we know he has forbidden or ignore doing the things we know he has commanded us to do. These are not just sins we fall into through weakness or thoughtlessness. These are acts of rebellion against our King at those moments when our human nature just plain doesn't want him to be our King—those times when we want to be the masters of our own fates and captains of our own souls.

And suddenly there we are, sitting in the council chamber of the Sanhedrin with Caiaphas presiding—or us presiding in his place. But we can't condemn Christ to a Roman cross as Caiaphas did. We condemn him to the backseat of our lives, out of sight and out of mind for the moment, while we do what we want to do and refuse to listen to him whom we call our Lord and King. And if we continue in this fashion, then we will soon cast him out of our lives as surely as the high priest and his evil followers cast him out of their nation.

Of all the people for us to be allied with! The members of the Sanhedrin who cast Jesus Christ out of the

fellowship of Israel because they would not have him in authority over them! They preferred to see him die on a Roman cross than to spend another minute listening to him and his words and commands.

But before we find ourselves so firmly set in their midst that we can't find the door out of that sinful chamber, we have to stop and think about what we are doing and what we are saying and who it is we are imitating. And then we need to fall to our knees and pray, "Father, teach us, for Jesus' sake, to submit to your and his authority!"

## **2. Father teach us, for Jesus' sake, to submit to your authority**

God, help us remember that we really are not fit to be the captains of our own fates or the pilots of our own souls. Have we forgotten how surely we will bring our ships to wreck and ruin if we start navigating? We are sinners, born in sin and living in it all our days. What sort of moral or ethical sense within ourselves can be our chart and compass when, as Scripture says, no good thing is present in our sinful flesh? We can see the shipwrecks that people make of their lives when they try to sail according to their own charts. They set their own rules. They make their own designs for the way life ought to be lived. And, in the end, they bring only sorrow and pain, if not to themselves then to the others they ram and sink in their mad desire to live free of every rule but their own.

It was to save us from such ruin and disaster that God's Son came to this earth and submitted himself to the authorities of the Jewish nation and of the Roman Empire. But more than that: He submitted himself to the authority of the divine law, which we so often throw aside. He submitted himself to the condemnation and death that we earn for ourselves. He did not allow us to set sail to eternal ruin and regret and punishment. He surrendered himself to the power of the wicked men who wanted to end his kingship once and for all. He allowed a Sanhedrin to try him and a Caiaphas to condemn him to death. Through this death he paid the price and penalty for our many and constant refusals to live under the authority of his commandments.

He saved us from our sinful path away from God and set us once again on the course that God, in his love and wisdom, had ordained for us from the beginning and revealed clearly in the pages of his Holy Word. Now that we know the price he paid and the damnation from which he saved us and the heaven to which he is guiding us, why would we ever entertain the thought of further mutiny?

Jesus Christ is the pilot of our lives. He and he alone is the captain of your soul and mine. Yes, we know that his commandments are sometimes hard to live by. We live in a sinful world and are pursued by the roaring lion who seeks to devour us. How could we imagine that living a Christian life would be a walk through a garden? Temptations will not cease, and again and again the world and the devil and our own sinful nature will tell us we are being fools. But Jesus gives us strength. It may indeed be that we will be giving up much that the world finds quite pleasurable. Is that too great a price to pay to show our gratitude to him who died to make us the children of God and citizens of the heavenly shore? He gave his life that we should belong to him and live in his kingdom and serve him. Will we throw that aside? Will we try to fool ourselves, as the high priest did, into believing that we know better than God what is right and what is wrong or what direction we should go and what paths we should avoid?

Remember what St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians: "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Co 5:15). Try to throw off his authority? Why? His authority is the most precious and important thing in a Christian's life.

"Master of my fate"? "Captain of my soul"? There is One and One alone who can truly make that claim for any of us, and it is not ourselves. It is the One who paid the great price to make us his own so that we might live under him in his kingdom and, as Luther so eloquently put it, "serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." Father, forgive us when we forget this and seek to deny your Son's divine authority! Make us right in your sight by the blood of your Son. Give us innocent hearts that truly seek to live by your commands. And teach us the blessedness of knowing Jesus Christ as our Savior and of living under his authority as our King. Amen.