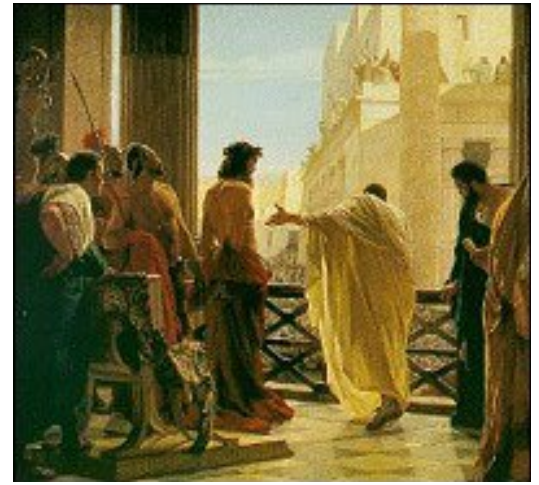


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church

Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz

Matthew 27:1,2 Lenten Vespers #5, March 5, 2008

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.



People of God—rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

There have long been trials—where leaders of the Church sat in judgment—accusing and trying and condemning people to death—and executing them! For just a few moments let us go back in time—to the Massachusetts Colony—to Salem and Ipswich and Andover. Beginning in February of 1692—and for the next year and three months people would be accused and tried and condemned and punished in the harshest possible ways. Over 150 people were arrested and imprisoned—even more were accused although never actually arrested. 29 people were convicted of the capital felony of witchcraft. Nineteen people—14 women and 5 men were hanged until dead! Five people died in prison—alone, cold, poorly fed and endlessly accused and shamed. One man—because he refused to enter a plea—was ordered to be crushed to death under heavy stones. Can you imagine that? Massive rocks and boulders piled on you—until they crushed the breath of life out of you! As horrible as that must have been—it pales to insignificance—compared to the miscarriage of justice—in the case of Jesus of Nazareth—the Son of man—the Son of God.

Today we stand beside Jesus at the crossroads

From Trial before the Sanhedrin—to Trial before Pilate

1. See the Passion of Jesus' enemies

2. See the Passion of Jesus

Jesus was arrested by the Jewish officials—in the night—in the dark—in the wee hours of the morning—in the Garden of Gethsemane. They tied him up—as if he was a dangerous criminal—which he was not. It's easy to imagine how tightly they tied him up—with rope or leather straps. It's easy to imagine—once they had him bound—how they must have pushed and shoved him. You could tie Jesus' hands in front of him. I'm guessing they tied his hands behind him—so he couldn't use his hands to push or fight back—behind him—so he would be helpless to protect himself—if they pushed him hard enough and he lost his balance and fell. They pushed and dragged Jesus to see Annas—the man who had been High Priest. This is written about—only in the Gospel of St. John. Annas was the High Priest—and was supposed to be High Priest for the rest of his life—until his Heavenly Father called him home to heaven. But something went wrong—most likely with the Roman Governor—so Annas wasn't High Priest any more. Instead his son-in-law Caiaphas was **High Priest that year**. Still—out of respect for who was supposed to be High Priest—Jesus' enemies took him to Annas first. Annas **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?" John 18:19b-23 From Annas they took Jesus – still bound to Caiaphas. By now – still dark outside – the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so 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.'" What was this? A terrorist threat to blow up Solomon's Temple – and then in three days put it all back together? What a strange threat that would have been! Except they knew that wasn't what Jesus meant. Jesus meant – put me to death – and in three days I will rise from the dead! I'll be alive again! They knew that's what he meant! How do I know that? We can thank Jesus' enemies – that we have one more sure and certain proof that Jesus rose from the dead. God's Word says – **The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."** "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. Matthew 27:62-66

Jesus' trial was all falling apart! Someone had to do something – or Jesus would get away again. Finally--desperate – **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.** Jesus did not dignify the lies screamed against him with a response! The high priest –turning from judge to prosecutor says – **"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. You wonder if Caiaphas was able to hide the joy he must have felt deep inside – if he could hide the smile – as in mock grief and pretend shock – he tore his high priestly robes. God's honor had been besmirched by this carpenter claiming to be God himself! He must be put to death! They all agreed! God's plan to rescue us from sin moved one more step to fulfillment!

Jesus allowed himself to be tied up – pushed around – beat upon – even condemned to a cruel death on the cross – to save you and me from our sins! There was a little sparrow – the other day – outside my window – by my little birdfeeder. This little sparrow was standing in the snow – by all the seeds that had been pushed out of the birdfeeder. I think something was wrong with this little sparrow. He just stood there – in the snow. You could see some of the little feathers weren't how they were supposed to be. You could see his little chest going in and out – like it was hard to breathe – or like his little heart was pounding. He would put his little beak under his wing – like he was going to sleep. Other birds would land and eat. A loud noise – and they all would fly away – except this one little bird. Something was wrong – painfully

wrong. But what could I do about it? What could I do? There wasn't anything I could do! Shoot him? Put him out of his misery. You could throw a rock – and be outside the city limits – where you could shoot. But not here – just down the street from the hospital. It was a terrible feeling – to be so helpless – to help one suffering little bird. What about all the people in the world? We were helpless to save ourselves from all our sins. Only Jesus could save us – and Jesus did! Jesus died to rescue and redeem us!

They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. Jesus enemies wanted him dead – and they would stop at nothing to see him dead. Once they had concluded the sham of a Jewish religious trial – it was time to move on to the political authorities – to see Jesus executed. Still Jesus did not resist. Everything would be fulfilled – to carry out God's plan to save us from our sins. Sin is always the problem. Every time we come to Church – we hear about our sins. The devil tempts us to think our sins aren't always all that terrible. There was a lady the other day – who was stopped by the police. It wasn't for drunk driving – or speeding – or hit and run – or crashing into someone. They pulled her over – because that little tiny light bulb that illuminated her rear license plate was burned out. They pulled her over and wrote her a ticket for that. It was then and only then – when they checked for any wants or warrants – that they realized--this lady had a court summons – for overdue library materials! Overdue library materials! How much could that be? I'm thinking – what is the penalty for an overdue book? 25¢ or maybe 50¢ a day? What is the penalty for a DVD? Maybe \$1 a day? This lady owed \$159! That sounds like a really lot! Somewhere – in there – it would be cheaper to replace what she borrowed – I'm thinking! Then they added \$172 for court costs. They must have had some kind of hearing – that she wasn't even at! The total she owed? \$331! So what they did was arrest her. I bet they did the Miranda thing. *"You have the right to remain silent. Any thing you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have a right to an attorney – and to have that attorney present during questioning. If you cannot afford an attorney – one will be appointed for you. Do you understand these rights as I have read them to you?"* This lady didn't have the money to pay her fines – so she spent the next 6 days in jail! I suppose you can debate – whether overdue books are a reason to be put in jail. But the simple fact is – she owed a penalty – and couldn't begin to pay it – her self! The Scriptures tell us – Eve and Adam took a bite of forbidden fruit – and that sin was so horrible in God's sight – that the consequence cannot be counted! For that sin – and every sin since – Jesus bled and suffered and died to save us. Jesus was condemned – and crucified to save us. That's how much Jesus loves you!

They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. Pontius Pilate was not a very nice person. As the Governor – installed by Caesar – to rule over Israel – Pontius Pilate had command of all kinds of Roman soldiers – the most powerful warriors the world had ever seen. There was not another army on the face of the earth that could withstand the legions of Rome! If you read in history recorded at the time of Pilate – you read where Roman soldiers came carrying Roman battle ensigns – standards – banners for different groups of soldiers – with emblems above the banners. The Jews considered these graven images offensive and protested to Pilate in the most passionate terms. Pilate simply ignored their protests for 5 days. Finally he invited them to the coliseum to hear their complaint. In a moment Pilate had the Jews surrounded by Roman soldiers. Abandon your religious complaint – stop your protest in the name of the LORD – or I will have you all killed! There could be no doubt Pilate meant what he threatened! What did the Jews do? They fell to the ground. They bared their neck. If death was the result of their faithfulness to the Great I AM – the Holy One of Israel

– then take my life – take it now! Such faith – such courage as this – could only come from the power of the Gospel in the hearts of God’s people! Pilate backed down and no one was hurt!

It was near the end of Jesus’ ministry when God’s Word says, **“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.** Can you imagine that? People killed in church – put to death by the communion rail – on the steps by our altar? Can you imagine that? **Jesus answered, “Do you thing that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish!** Again – we dasn’t think terrible things only happen to terrible people. But rather that I repent of my sins – and trust in Jesus’ blood. Pilate was part of a very corrupt government. Notice that Jesus did not spend his public ministry trying to clean up Jerusalem’s government or that of Rome. Jesus said **give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar** – your tax money – your obedience to law and good order. **Give to God what belongs to God.** That would be all your heart – all your soul – all your strength – all your mind. Take care of the Kingdom of God – and puny earthly kingdoms will take care of themselves!

Chances are you never heard of Johnny Briscoe. Johnny Briscoe was accused of horrible crimes – burglary, robbery, stealing and armed criminal action – plus unspeakable hurt to his victim. His victim identified him. He was convicted in court. Johnny was sentenced to 45 years in prison. Johnny said he didn’t do it. No one was impressed. Johnny’s defense attorney wanted to run DNA tests on some of the evidence – like the last little part of some cigarettes! Oh, they said – that evidence had been lost or destroyed. Johnny spent 23 years in prison – looked down on and hated by all the other prisoners – for his terrible crimes. Finally – in a freezer – they find evidence from Johnny’s case. Two years later – they tell Johnny’s lawyer they have found this evidence. The last little piece of a cigarette is tested – and low and behold – Johnny is declared not guilty! Can you imagine serving 23 years – for a crime you didn’t commit? Again – as terrible as that might be – Jesus never ever did *anything* wrong. And yet – he was punished for every crime Johnny Briscoe was accused of. Jesus died for Johnny’s sins and he died for ours, too! Jesus – the most pure and innocent of all died. He died because he loved us that much. Passion like that – is love and forgiveness for us to appreciate forever! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz