

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 11, 2018**

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

Hymns: 143:1-6, 369:1-2, 323, 321, 358:1-4.

Lessons: Isaiah 53:1-12, Acts 4:1-12, Mark 15:6-15.

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:15-26.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have four accounts of Jesus' sufferings and death, and because all are the inspired Word of God, we know that all are correct. Each Gospel has its own purposes and audience, and Bible scholars have pointed out the following aspects of each evangelist.

Matthew emphasizes the guilt of Israel through its leaders.

Mark is presenting the nobility of Jesus' person, his greatness in spite of his lowliness.

Luke emphasizes the innocence of Jesus.

John stresses that Pontius Pilate repeatedly seeks to set Jesus free.

But through all of these Scriptures, we must realize that each evangelist is not recording every single detail of what took place during the eighteen or so hours before Jesus died on the cross.

Today we look at more details of the

**TRIAL BEFORE PILATE**

- 1. Pilate tries to release Jesus, finding no fault in him.**
- 2. But the Jews relentlessly demand that Jesus be crucified.**

There was a large crowd gathered by the leaders of the Jews. This no doubt was intended to help intimidate or use a certain amount of pressure on Pilate so that he would do what they wanted. They now have the mob on their side.

In our sermon last Sunday we emphasized that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in charge of Palestine, found no fault in Jesus. We talked about the accusations the Jewish leaders had brought against Jesus claiming he was stirring up people all over Judea and falsely claimed he was opposing payment of taxes to Caesar. In fact, they claimed that Jesus was a king, not understanding at all that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. We concluded with the idea that ***"Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no basis for a charge against this man.' But they insisted, 'He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.'"*** Pilate declares as a judge that he has determined that there is no basis for the charges. A good, righteous judge would have dismissed the charges then and there and freed Jesus. But there is a large crowd which soon becomes a mob, and they include influential leaders among the Jews, who had power to guide, direct and lead the Jews and tell them or encourage them how to behave toward the civil powers. Pilate, as a politician, no doubt realized this and wanted to keep peace in his province. He wants to free Jesus. But he knows they have power to incite the crowd, and this is obvious from the things that happen. ***"He went out again to the Jews and said, 'I find no basis for a charge against him.'"***

Mark then gives us an interlude in which Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, tetrarch of Galilee. Pilate sees a glimmer of hope. If this man is a Galilean, then he could send him to King Herod to let him resolve the matter. But it doesn't work out that way. Pilate doesn't get off the hook. Herod will send him back to Pilate.

***"Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, '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. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.*” That would be Pilate’s resolution. He would punish an innocent man just to appease the Jews. But that isn’t good enough for the leaders of the Jews, who want Jesus dead.

So he tries another tack. *“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?’”* All the evangelists record the history of Barabbas being released instead of Jesus.

*“They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.”* Barabbas was a notorious prisoner, who *“was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.”* Pilate thought that he would find a solution in offering to release a notorious prisoner, a murderer and a revolutionary instead of the plainly innocent Jesus. He didn’t think that they wanted a murderer and a revolutionary free among them. But it didn’t work.

Instead, the guilty one goes free and the innocent one is punished. That, after all, was God’s solution to sin. His only-begotten Son, the most innocent one ever, was to be punished and as a result, every guilty human being is justified by God. That means that every human is declared not guilty of all his or her sins. Thus every human has the ability, through faith in that declaration of God, to never be punished eternally for his sins. Jesus died for all the sins of all mankind. As a result, God justifies all mankind. That means that God declares all mankind, everyone, not guilty. But this is received by faith, and only by faith. No faith, no salvation. *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”* Mark 16:16 (NIV)

Pilate gives them a choice. *“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. “But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.” They “persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.” “With one voice they cried out, ‘Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!’*

*“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!’” “Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’”* The leaders of the Jews want to make an example of Jesus. They don’t simply want to stone him and so kill him that way, as their laws would demand. After all, who would see it? There would be a group of people who would do the stoning but all that anyone else would see would be a pile of stones covering up the crushed, death body.

But Crucifixion! That would be up on a post, a cross. Then everyone who passed by could see the example made of this Jesus of Nazareth. That should teach his followers! And everyone could see! In addition, that’s the way God planned it! Jesus himself had said *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.”* And that would have this blessed result: *“that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”* John 3:14-15 (NIV) It had to be seen, but the Jews really didn’t know that and understand from Scripture, their very own Scriptures, that this is the way it had to be.

Crucifixion. What a horrible way to die! Jesus’ arms were stretched out and nails were pounded into his hands, probably into his wrists to support the weight of his body. Nails would also be driven into his feet, preventing any movement. Sometimes artists have pictured crucifixion as including ropes tied around the arms of the person to hold them on the cross, particularly the two evildoers who were crucified alongside Jesus. But the Roman executioners were efficient and cruel. It was their job to kill the man as horribly as possible.

Crucifixion was usually intended to provide a death that was particularly slow, painful, gruesome, humiliating, and public.

Historians write of several possible causes of death because of crucifixion. These include asphyxiation or suffocation because the crucified one could not breathe after a time of having his arms stretched out beside him. Other causes included heart failure, thirst, shock, pulmonary embolism, pain and infection from the wounds of the nails and the scourging, which was often done first. Jesus, of course, had been scourged and beaten repeatedly before his crucifixion.

And we could guess that crucifixion, too, was a sort of entertainment for the people. As horrible as it is, people take a perverse pleasure in watching others suffer.

***“Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.’ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, 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.”*** This idea, that Jesus might be some sort of a son of God probably frightened Pilate. Many Romans were very superstitious about their false, pagan gods.

***“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!’”*** This crowd had now become a mob. There were possibly people in the crowd who really didn’t know much about what was going on. But their religious leaders were demanding something, and in their blindness, many thought that whatever the leaders demanded must be right. It is to some of these same people that the apostles preached most harshly after the resurrection about how they were the ones who crucified Jesus before they heard the Gospel of forgiveness. But in reality, all mankind is guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus because of our 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.’ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. ‘Here is your king,’ Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, ‘Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!’ ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ Pilate asked. ‘We have no king but Caesar,’ the chief priests answered.”***

They make an attack on Pilate’s loyalty to Caesar. If word about that should get out, his political career would be at an end. So Pilate formally sits on the judge’s seat and the matter comes to a conclusion.

***“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.***

Pilate makes a great show of trying to proclaim his innocence. He tries to ‘wash his hands of the entire matter’. But you know and I know that Pilate was just as innocent as every human being when it comes to Jesus’ death. And no human being is innocent of the death of Jesus!

And the people in the crowd! The Jews! They try to tell Pilate that they will take responsibility for Jesus’ death. Here are words that have been greatly misunderstood and misused throughout history. Yes, the Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus. That was foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures; and in the first chapter of John’s gospel we read that Jesus ***“came unto his own, and his own received him not.”*** John 1:11 (KJV) Yes, Jews physically murdered Jesus, even if in many churches these words of Scripture are not read! But they are not the only ones guilty of Jesus’ death. You are. I am. Every sinner is. And every human being is a sinner.

There are times in our own lives when even we want to go along with the crowd and get rid of Jesus. For example, we may think that the crowd is having so much fun that we want to forget our Christian values, Jesus, and our faith. But we must be vigilant – with God’s help – and flee from such temptations.

So even though sinners are responsible for the death of Jesus, sinners are the very ones Jesus came to redeem. Always remember he was crucified for us. That was his purpose in life, to give eternal life. Never forget that, but believe that Jesus saved you! Amen.