

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 18, 2018

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

Hymns: 149, 342:1-2, 325, 361, 173.

Lessons: Isaiah 50:4-7, 1 Corinthians 2:1-8, Mark 15:6-20.

Sermon Text: John 19:1-16.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday we left Jesus in the hands of Pilate who had given up trying to set Jesus free. *“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.”* Matthew 27:15-26 (NIV)

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 he was just as guilty as every human being when it comes to Jesus’ death. And the people in the crowd try to tell Pilate that they will take responsibility for Jesus’ death. Yes, Jews physically murdered Jesus. 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. Today we hear again how

JESUS IS SENTENCED TO DEATH

- 1. Pilate tried to appease the Jews but**
- 2. He finally condemned Jesus to be crucified.**

Three times Pilate tried to avoid passing the death sentence on Jesus. But after Herod the tetrarch sent Jesus back to him we read: *“Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”* He had declared his belief in the innocence of Christ, and yet he still has the prisoner scourged. Scourging or flogging was a terrible punishment. The victim was tied to a pillar or post and his bare back was whipped. The whip had a number of leather thongs to which were attached pieces of lead or iron or broken glass or pieces of bone or stones. This, of course, would result in tearing his skin. This in itself was indescribable torture, because the prisoner’s naked back was cut to pieces with the scourge. Sometimes the victims died under the scourging itself.

Pilate hoped that the Jews would be content with this terrible beating of Jesus. He makes an effort to appease the people in this way. He doesn’t want to condemn Jesus to death, so he is willing to flog him without mercy. This is certainly inconsistent with what he has concluded, that Jesus is innocent. But he is willing to punish him. The innocent one is punished, and Barabbas, the guilty one goes free. But this was God’s plan.

Did you notice why he did this? *“Wanting to satisfy the crowd.”* He was willing to go along with the crowd. We could find several excuses for him wanting to go along with the crowd. But for a Christian, a follower of Christ, there is never a good excuse for *“wanting to satisfy the crowd,”* or wanting to go along with the crowd when the crowd is not behaving or even talking as Christians should. Has this ever happened? Or should we ask ‘how often does this kind of compromise happen?’

We aren’t normally in situations where our lives will be in danger if we stand up and speak out for Jesus instead of satisfying the crowd. But if you know anything about history – Roman history, English history,

German history, Middle Eastern history, Spanish history and even about current events – probably just about anywhere Christianity has been persecuted – you know that Christians have been killed because they refused to satisfy the crowd.

And us? Have we ever been tempted to set aside our convictions because someone was pressuring us in some way? Were we ever trying to be something that Christ does not want us to be? But don't we often just do a little denying? Don't we often just give in a little? Don't we sometimes want to compromise what God says in his Word? May God preserve us and give us strength to observe everything Christ has commanded us.

When we stand up against the wrong it is always foolish to make concessions. It is far better to even be martyred in the right cause than to yield in matters pertaining to conscience and plainly laid down in the Word of God.

But Pilate gave in. After all, he wasn't a believer. He wasn't a Christian. But that doesn't make his sin in wanting to satisfy the crowd any less terrible. So Pilate released Barabbas, the murderer, the revolutionary, the insurrectionist to walk free among the Jews.

What about Jesus? ***“Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him”*** Here again, just as Herod and his men had done, Jesus is robed as if he were a king. The soldiers were gathered around him. Surely this was not a nice clean robe that a king would wear to be honored, but an old, dirty red robe. After all, Jesus was bloody and bruised, having been beaten, flogged, and now he had a crown of thorns jammed on his head. They put a staff in his right hand, much as a king might hold a staff of honor, a staff showing his royal authority.

And the crown of thorns! Artists usually show a nice, neat little crown of thorns with maybe a few drops of blood. There is a thorn that grows in the vicinity of Jerusalem which has thorns much sharper than the usual thorns. We know that it was not a pleasant sight. Isaiah tells us that ***“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*** Isaiah 53:2-3 (NIV)

The crown was certainly not the crown of the laurel leaves which Roman emperors wore. The robe he wore was also surely not a robe that a king would wear!

The soldiers were not satisfied with the flogging. They had another punishment to inflict on the uncomplaining Christ. Having braided or plaited a ring or crown of thorns, they pressed it down upon his head, causing the sharp points to penetrate through the tender skin into the sensitive flesh. To complete the mockery, they took an old scarlet robe and threw it on him.

“And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’” Mockery, again. The soldiers had heard the accusations that Jesus was a king, the king of the Jews. They salute and praise and mock this beaten, bleeding, and bound man as if he were a king! The words of the Psalmist are fulfilled: ***“people stare and gloat over me.”*** Psalm 22:17 (NIV)

“Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him.” The beatings continue. Don't think that these were gentle taps on the head. This man was going to die, and anything they did to him now wouldn't matter. These soldiers were just having some fun, for this man had been condemned. No one would need to help him or bandage him or do things to help him heal.

They rained blows on his head and body, partly from cruelty, partly from resentment, since Jesus suffered everything with divine patience. He suffered without complaint, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is fulfillment of the words of Isaiah: ***“I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”*** Isaiah 50:6 (NIV)

“Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him.” They were falsely honoring him, all in a mocking spirit. And the mockery didn't end here. It ended when Jesus died on the cross. They bowed their knees in mock

homage, and hailed him as the King of the Jews. This blasphemy mocked Jesus, but it also showed their contempt of the Jews. They “worshipped” him. They gave him “honor” as if he were a king, or even a god, although they did not recognize him as the true and only God. This public show of respect, honor, and reverence toward him was all just a mockery, making fun of him and abusing him.

“And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him.” After they had mocked him in this way and when they were ready to lead him out to crucify him, they put his own clothes back on him.

In the course of all this beating and mockery, Pilate points Jesus out to the Jewish mob and says **“Behold the man!”** (KJV) John writes that **“When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’”** **“Behold the man!”** ‘Look at him now. Are you happy? He has been beaten and humiliated.’ Perhaps Pilate was wondering if the terrible sight of Jesus now would cause some of the Jews to feel pity for him and relent in demanding his death.

Pilate had hoped that this exhibition of cruelty and beating Jesus would satisfy the Jews, and that he might be able to convince them that he should set Jesus free. He presents to them the man with the crown of thorns and the faded scarlet robe, merely pointing to the Lord with the words: **“Behold the man!”** A sentimental crowd might have been impressed, but here was a mob dominated by hatred, upon whom the sight of blood merely had the effect of enraging them all the more. With the chief priests and the guards of the Temple leading them and stirring them up, the people shouted again and again their demand: Crucify, crucify!

That is the world. That is the way of all those under the power of Satan. The unbelieving world cannot endure the righteous and innocent. The world prefers the rebel and murderer Barabbas to Christ, the Preacher of truth. The world is not satisfied, even if Christ – and the believer in Christ – is punished to some extent.

The Jews are not satisfied even though Jesus, the Preacher of truth, is whipped and scourged. And the leaders of the mob knew just how to keep the bloodthirstiness at the highest point. The repetition of the one word, “Crucify!” ended up silencing all opposition. Pilate tries to shake off all responsibility, repeating his statement that he finds no fault in Jesus. He even tries to wash his hands of the entire matter, making a show of literally washing his hands. But the time to reason was long past. What could one man do? But we know that Pilate, as a sinful human being, is just as guilty as the Jews – and us – of the crucifixion of the Savior of all mankind.

Pilate says **“Behold your King!”** **“Here is the man!”** **“Here is your king!”** The words really showed Pilate’s hatred and contempt for the Jews. That was their own accusation. They wanted him executed because he had claimed to be a king. A fine picture of a king he made in his present appearance! They insisted upon executing Jesus. Pilate is asking ‘shall I really crucify your king?’ But the chief priests answered **“we have no king but Caesar”**. The Sadducees, the Pharisees, the leaders of the Jews, really wanted to be delivered from the rule and power of the Romans. But here they profess a false loyalty in order to get rid of Jesus. Their claim of faithfulness to the emperor would certainly gain the approval of Pilate. But it really shows a loyalty to Satan.

We may feel sorry for Pilate, but would we have done any better? He had tried to set Jesus free, but did not follow through with his conviction that Christ was innocent. Taking a stand was too dangerous politically. Yes, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, but that does not excuse Pilate – or you – or me. The whole account paints a clear picture: a guilty world, a guiltless savior. Thank God for him!

“Then they led him out to crucify him.” This was the end of Jesus’ trials before men. The innocent one was about to be crucified. Pilate gives in to the Jewish leadership and surrenders Jesus to their will. He decides to keep peace in Jerusalem by sacrificing the life of one innocent person. And so Pilate finally permitted these events to reach their climax in the condemnation of Christ: He delivered Jesus to be crucified.

But this is the way God planned it. Thus Christ himself is innocent, but in our stead, in our place, he is guilty, for he has taken our part to pay our guilt. But for us there is a world of comfort in that fact, that Jesus suffered and died as the Son of God. That gives to his Passion the real, lasting worth. Yes, he will be crucified. But you know why. For your sins, so that by faith in him you might never die eternally. O God, let us see this comfort in the condemnation of Jesus. Amen.